



Frequently Asked Questions about the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program

Updated 03/31/22

Introduction

This fact sheet provides answers to questions about Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)'s free sampling and analysis program for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in private drinking water wells. The [MassDEP Fact Sheet - PFAS in Drinking Water: Questions and Answers for Consumers](#) describes the sources of PFAS compounds, health effects, and MassDEP recommendations to reduce consumer exposure. The [Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances \(PFAS\) in Private Well Drinking Water Supplies FAQ](#) describes what private well owners need to know about the possibility of PFAS in well water.

1. What are PFAS and why are they a concern?

PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals used in a variety of consumer products and industries throughout the world. PFAS have been used in some firefighting foams, a number of industrial processes, and to make materials that are resistant to water, grease and stains for use in carpets, clothing, fabrics for furniture, paper packaging for food, cookware, leather goods, ski waxes, and more. Because these chemicals have been used in many consumer products over the past 50 years, most people have been exposed to them.

PFAS have been found to seep into surface soils, groundwater and surface water, and thereby contaminate drinking water. PFAS exposures have been linked to a variety of health risks, particularly in people who are immune-compromised, women who are pregnant or nursing, and in infants. Because there are currently no federal drinking water standards for any PFAS, Massachusetts (and several other states) established standards for some of these chemicals. These standards were adopted due to their toxicity, presence in drinking water systems, persistence in the human body when ingested and close chemical similarities. On October 2, 2020, MassDEP published its PFAS public drinking water standard or Massachusetts Maximum Contaminant Level (MMCL) of 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L), or parts per trillion (ppt) applicable to community (COM) and non-transient non-community (NTNC) systems for the sum of the concentrations of six specific PFAS. The six PFAS are: perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS); perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA); perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS); perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA); perfluoroheptanoic acid (PFHpA); and perfluorodecanoic acid (PFDA). MassDEP abbreviates this set of six PFAS as "PFAS6." This drinking water standard is set to be protective against adverse health effects for all people consuming the water. For information on the PFAS6 drinking water standard see: [310 CMR 22.00: The Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations](#).

2. What are some of the reasons I might test my private well for PFAS?

If your well is located near potential sources of PFAS or near other water supplies where PFAS has been detected, you may consider sampling your well water. Potential sources of PFAS in groundwater may include airfields where firefighting foams were used, firefighting training areas, certain manufacturing

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

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facilities, and some waste disposal sites. Because PFAS have been widely used in consumer products, septic systems and landfills may also be sources of PFAS in groundwater. You may wish to sample your well even without knowledge of specific potential sources of PFAS contamination, because many potential sources of PFAS have yet to be identified.

3. What is the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program?

MassDEP will be conducting PFAS testing for a limited number of private wells, focusing on the 85 Massachusetts towns where 60% or more of residents are served by private wells. Private wells are regulated by local Boards of Health, which are overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. MassDEP will work with these entities, other local partners, and MassDEP’s contractor, the University of Massachusetts (UMass), to select and provide for free sampling and analysis of selected private wells. An estimated 20–40 wells will be selected within each of the 85 towns based on priorities including geographic distribution throughout the town, proximity to potential sources of PFAS, and available funding. All private well owners in the 85 towns are welcome to apply online at: <https://dwp-pfas.madwpdep.org/>. The 85 Massachusetts towns in which 60% or more of residents are served by private wells are:

ALFORD	DOVER	MOUNT WASHINGTON	SAVOY
AQUINNAH	DUNSTABLE	NANTUCKET*	SHELBURNE
ASHBY	ERVING	NEW ASHFORD	SHERBORN
ASHFIELD	FLORIDA	NEW BRAINTREE	SHUTESBURY
BECKET	FREETOWN	NEW MARLBOROUGH	STOW
BELCHERTOWN	GOSHEN	NEW SALEM	SUTTON
BERKLEY	GRANBY	NEWBURY	TOLLAND
BERLIN	GRANVILLE	OAKHAM	TRURO
BOLTON	HAMPDEN	OTIS	TYNGSBOROUGH
BOXBOROUGH*	HARVARD	PELHAM	TYRINGHAM
BOXFORD	HAWLEY	PERU	WALES
BRIMFIELD	HEATH	PETERSHAM	WARWICK
BUCKLAND	HOLLAND	PHILLIPSTON	WASHINGTON
CARLISLE	HUBBARDSTON	PLAINFIELD	WELLFLEET*
CARVER	LAKEVILLE	PLYMPTON	WENDELL
CHARLEMONT	LEVERETT	PRINCETON	WEST TISBURY
CHARLTON	LEYDEN	REHOBOTH	WESTHAMPTON
CHESTERFIELD	MENDON	RICHMOND	WESTPORT
CHILMARK*	MIDDLEFIELD	ROCHESTER	WINDSOR
CLARKSBURG	MILLVILLE	ROWE	
COLRAIN	MONTEREY	ROYALSTON	
CONWAY	MONTGOMERY	SANDISFIELD	

*Towns added based on summer population and population updates

4. How does a private well owner sign up for PFAS sampling?

Private well owners in eligible towns are welcome to apply by completing an application form online at <https://dwp-pfas.madwpdep.org/>. Select private well owners may receive a postcard inviting them to apply. Once a homeowner has applied and been selected, they will be contacted by MassDEP's UMass contractor by email, asking them to confirm their contact information and sign an agreement form. We recommend adding pfas-pwo@umass.edu to your safe senders list, i.e., whitelist, to ensure our correspondence with you does not end up in your SPAM folder.

5. If a well is not selected for the program, are there other resources available?

MassDEP will provide technical assistance information on PFAS for all private well owners as part of its private well guidance and outreach program that will engage Boards of Health and other local partners. There are many resources already available for private well owners listed below, and the UMass Technical Assistance Providers are available to answer questions at pfas-pwo@umass.edu. The Rural Community Assistance Program (RCAP) is also available to provide technical assistance to private well owners. Contact RCAP at <https://www.rcapsolutions.org/contact/>. Your local Board of Health is an additional resource to consult about your private well water.

You may also decide to have your well tested for PFAS at your own expense. To find a laboratory certified for PFAS analysis, use this search tool: [Certified Laboratory Search Results \(state.ma.us\)](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/certified-laboratory-search-results-state-ma-us). Select the state of MA, the analyte PFAS, and the Matrix potable water to produce a list of MassDEP certified labs that test for PFAS in drinking water. Indicate to the lab you are a private well owner and would like to sample your well water for PFAS. If you have a whole house water treatment system, it is recommended that you take two samples; one prior to treatment and one after treatment in order to test your raw and finished water for PFAS. Visit DEP's private well webpage at [Private Wells | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/private-wells-mass) for information on sampling for other constituents in your well water.

6. How are the water samples for the MassDEP Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program collected?

The private well owner will be responsible for collecting the water samples, so there is no requirement to provide access to your home. MassDEP UMass contractors and the labs will provide clear, simple instructions to the private well owners on how to collect samples. A training video available at <https://youtu.be/OgCtjLBVKYo> demonstrates how to collect drinking water samples for PFAS.

If the home has a water treatment system, the water sample should be untreated (pre-treatment) water. Use a tap located before any treatment unit or system to collect an untreated sample. This is typically found in the basement on the plumbing before it enters the treatment system, although an outdoor faucet (no hose), may also work if it is untreated. Water collected after treatment may not reflect the water quality in the well.

MassDEP UMass contractors are also available at pfas-pwo@umass.edu to guide you through sample collection and to answer any questions.

7. How does the selected private well owner get the water sample bottles for PFAS sampling?

Once the private well owner has been accepted for free PFAS lab analyses the MassDEP Drinking Water Program or the UMass contractor will contact the private well owner to verify their information, including mailing address, and arrange for a sample collection timeframe.

The MassDEP Contracted Laboratory will send a sampling kit to the private well owner containing instructions, a Chain-of-Custody form, and sample bottles. With the exception of island communities, a laboratory courier will deliver and retrieve the sampling kits from the private well owner's home. On the islands, the kits will be mailed to the private well owner and the well owner will be required to transport their completed kits to the designated UPS store. The return postage will be included.

Note: Your contacts for any questions regarding the status of your free PFAS sampling will be:

- The UMass contractor Technical Assistance Providers at pfas-pwo@umass.edu.
- The MassDEP Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov using the subject "Private Well PFAS Sampling Program."

8. Which PFAS contaminants will the Massachusetts certified laboratory analyze the PFAS water samples for?

Currently, there are three USEPA testing methodologies for testing drinking water for PFAS. The current MassDEP Drinking Water regulations approved testing drinking water by USEPA Methods 537 and 537.1. These methods test for 18 PFAS compounds, including the PFAS6 compounds that are regulated by MassDEP's PFAS drinking water standard. The additional 12 unregulated PFAS compounds will also be analyzed by the certified laboratory, and the results for all 18 PFAS compounds will be included in the PFAS water sampling results.

9. Why do the PFAS water sampling results include other PFAS in addition to the regulated PFAS6?

MassDEP is also collecting information on the presence of other PFAS compounds in drinking water. These include all the PFAS that are included in the USEPA approved analytical method for drinking water. Although Massachusetts drinking water standards and guidelines have not been set for these other PFAS compounds, MassDEP has concluded that it is important to monitor these other PFAS in order to help target future research and regulatory efforts.

10. What does it mean if other unregulated PFAS are detected in my drinking water?

Many of the additional PFAS that are typically included in the drinking water analytical test method are believed to pose less risk than the regulated PFAS6. For other unregulated PFAS, potential risks have not been evaluated at this time due to limited data and/or differences in chemical properties. Drinking water values have been developed for some of these other PFAS by other states. These values may be useful to assess the possible significance of detections of these PFAS in drinking water. They include the following values provided below¹:

- PFHxA: 400,000 ppt (Michigan);
- PFBS: 420 ppt (Michigan) and 2000 ppt (Minnesota);
- PFBA: 7000 ppt (Minnesota);
- HFPO-DA: 370 (Michigan).

¹ Current as of 4/15/2021. As the science and regulations are evolving for PFAS these values may change. For more information, please visit these state's PFAS webpages.

If you are concerned about these or other PFAS detected in your drinking water, you could reduce your exposure by using bottled water that has been tested by a certified laboratory using EPA approved analytical methods for PFAS and determined to be non-detect. For more information on bottled water that has been tested for PFAS, and results, see MassDEP's [list of bottled water companies that have tested their water for PFAS](#). Some home water treatment systems may also be able to reduce PFAS levels in the water. See [MassDEP's Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances \(PFAS\) in Private Well Drinking Water Supplies FAQ](#) for information regarding treatment devices that are known to remove many types of PFAS contaminants from water. For additional information you may wish to consult with your health care provider, local Health Department or Board of Health or MassDEP.

11. What is involved in the quality control check of the PFAS laboratory results?

The PFAS laboratory analysis is performed by a laboratory certified by Massachusetts to conduct PFAS analysis. Upon receiving results from the Massachusetts certified laboratory, the UMass contractor performs a quality control review of the results to ensure the quality of the data. In the event that additional information about the results becomes available after they have been provided to the well owner, the private well owner will be contacted by the UMass contractor.

12. How are the selected private well owners informed of the PFAS water sampling results?

After receiving the sampling results from a Massachusetts certified laboratory, the UMass contractor performs a quality control check of the PFAS laboratory testing results. The UMass contractor will then email a copy of the lab report to the private well owner with a cover letter including recommended actions, if needed. The local board of health and MassDEP will be copied on the email. If the PFAS water sampling results are greater than 20 ppt for the PFAS6, the UMass contractor will call the private well owner.

The private well owner may contact the MassDEP/UMass Contractor at pfas-pwo@umass.edu with any questions regarding the lab report.

13. Will MassDEP collect any additional samples after the initial samples?

If the lab results of the first sample indicate that individually or the sum of any of the six-regulated PFAS chemicals are detected at levels greater than 10 parts per trillion (ppt) in the water, MassDEP may request that the well owner collect one or more additional samples to confirm the result and to help identify any potential sources of PFAS contamination. The confirmatory samples are part of the free analyses; the well owner will be contacted and provided with a confirmation sampling kit.

14. What will happen if PFAS is confirmed to be present in a private well?

In Massachusetts private well owners are responsible for their wells' water quality and for the design, installation, monitoring, and maintenance of treatment systems. MassDEP and its UMass contractor can provide technical assistance on ways to reduce exposure to PFAS in drinking water, including the use of bottled water and installation of treatment systems.

15. What will happen if PFAS in the well water is confirmed at an elevated level?

PFAS6 compounds are readily removed from drinking water with the installation of a proper treatment system. MassDEP and the UMass contractor will contact the private well owner and provide technical assistance on any recommended steps to take based on the PFAS results. Recommendations may include installing a treatment system to address PFAS in drinking water and immediately switching to PFAS-free bottled water. The costs of installing a whole house treatment system is typically in the low thousands of dollars with ongoing maintenance costs for testing and filter replacement. Point of use treatment systems (such as one dedicated to your kitchen sink) may also be effective with smaller initial costs (less than \$500) but will require more frequent testing and filter replacement to ensure water quality.

Detection of PFAS6 above 20 ppt in a Private Well may have legal and financial implications for its owner. *Each owner will be notified of this in advance of participating and acknowledge this on their signup form.* A PFAS6 result of 20 ppt or above is a reportable concentration under Massachusetts Regulation 310 CMR 40.0000, the [Massachusetts Contingency Plan](#). The MassDEP Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup (BWSC) will receive copies of all private well PFAS lab results for waste site notification and cleanup requirements. MassDEP BWSC will follow-up with the well owner to ensure that private wells with detections higher than 90 ppt (i.e., Imminent Hazards under the regulations) are addressed in a timely manner. The [PFAS Private Wells Sampling Program 21E Q&A](#) provides information on MassDEP BWSC possible action, depending on the level of PFAS detected in the well (< 20 ppt, from 20 to 90 ppt, or > 90 ppt).

16. What are the potential costs if a private well owner's property is found to be the source PFAS contamination?

To date, MassDEP's experience has been that private wells (residential locations) are generally affected by off-property, non-residential sources (e.g., nearby fire training locations, industry, etc.), therefore, they are categorized with downgradient property status, or DPS. The extent to which MassDEP will bill for work it performs depends on whether the PFAS6 migrated to your property from somewhere else. A DPS property owner will not be billed.

When considering whether your home could be the actual source of PFAS contamination, you should think about the past use(s) of the property over the past 20–50 years and whether any of those uses on that property may have involved PFAS. The potential costs would be very case-specific. If your property is determined to be the source of contamination, even a simple example would require that a Licensed Site Professional be hired to oversee sampling of groundwater (and likely soil) and make the required submittals to MassDEP. If the contamination is found to be widespread – affecting other homes in the neighborhood, not just yours – substantially more sampling would be required and could include the installation of treatment systems in multiple homes. Thus, the potential costs could range from tens-of-thousands of dollars (for a relatively simple site) up to hundreds of thousands, or more.

17. Will the laboratory results of the PFAS testing of selected private wells be made public?

Lab results of all PFAS tests will be provided to the private well owner and MassDEP. In addition, a copy of all results will be provided to the appropriate local board of health. Individual private well owner results will not be automatically provided to the public. Anonymized results with no individual owner information will be used by MassDEP to develop PFAS characterization maps. However, records of laboratory results of PFAS testing are considered public documents and therefore may be made publicly available as per the Massachusetts Public Records Law. Results from and progress of our program are available via this public

story map (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-in-private-well-drinking-water-supplies-faq#pfas-testing-in-private-wells->) with anonymized results. Results are updated twice monthly.

18. Will there be a final report summarizing the Private Well PFAS Sampling Program?

Yes, upon conclusion of the program MassDEP and the UMass contractor will develop a final report providing information on the program. A copy of the final report will be made public and provided to all Private Well PFAS Sampling Program participants when it becomes available.

19. Are public water supplies also testing for PFAS?

Yes, under the recently revised MassDEP regulations all public water supplies must test for PFAS. The Baker-Polito Administration secured funding in two supplemental budgets adopted by the Massachusetts Legislature to provide free PFAS analyses for both private wells and public water supplies across the Commonwealth. Information on the free PFAS lab analyses program for public water systems is available in the links below. The information collected from both selected private wells and public water supplies will be used to characterize PFAS levels in the groundwater and surface water of the Commonwealth and inform MassDEP's strategy for treatment and mitigation of this emerging contaminant. You may find up-to-date information regarding the public water supply testing for PFAS here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas#pfas-detected-in-drinking-water-supplies-in-massachusetts->

20. Who may I contact for information or technical assistance on free PFAS samples?

Send an email with your questions to pfas-pwo@umass.edu or to Program.director-DWP@mass.gov with the Subject: "Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program."

21. What are some Town considerations?

Local Boards of Health regulate private wells and the owner of a private well is generally responsible for ensuring the quality of the drinking water and addressing any contaminants. Residents with PFAS in their private well will likely have questions for the Board of Health and other Town officials. MassDEP Drinking Water Program and its UMass contractor can provide technical assistance on ways to reduce exposure to PFAS in drinking water, including the use of bottled water and installation of treatment systems.

If a Town facility, such as a landfill or firefighter training area, is identified as a source of PFAS contamination, the Town could have obligations under the state Waste Site Cleanup Program required response actions under the state Waste Site Cleanup Program may include testing additional private wells in the area and the provision of bottled water/treatment systems to the affected area. For more specific information on the state Waste Site Cleanup Program, email bwsc.information@mass.gov.

22. How is Massachusetts addressing PFAS?

There are many ways Massachusetts is addressing PFAS, including, but not limited to:

- Legislature provided \$8.4M requested by Baker-Polito Administration for:

- MassDEP, with technical assistance partners UMass Amherst and UMass Lowell, testing of public water supplies throughout Massachusetts for PFAS
- MassDEP, with technical assistance partners UMass Amherst and UMass Lowell, testing of private wells throughout Massachusetts for PFAS
- Grants to municipal water suppliers to address PFAS in drinking water
- \$20M to Clean Water Trust for communities to address contamination issues.
- MassDEP has established a public drinking water standard and a Maximum Contaminant Limit (MCL) of 20 ppt for the sum of six PFAS compounds (PFAS6) in drinking water for public water supplies (October 2020)
- MassDEP PFAS-related site work under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, 310 CMR 40.0000:
 - Promulgated notification criteria & cleanup standards for soil and groundwater (December 2019)
 - Published PFAS Sampling Guidance (2018, revised October 2020)
 - PFAS site discovery, targeted testing, and site cleanup
- Implemented take-back program that collected more than 170,000 lbs of PFAS-containing AFFF (firefighting foam) from more than 70 public safety agencies.
- Provided technical & logistical support to MassDEP PFAS-initiatives, including access to contract labs and lab certifications
- Monitoring and testing of biota and surface water
- Evaluating biosolid residuals and developing standards
- Monitoring municipal and industrial wastewater treatment in coordination with EPA and reducing PFAS in industrial and municipal wastewater through permitting requirements
- Testing and evaluating mosquitocides used for EEE spraying and coordinating with EPA

For more information, visit:

MassDEP PFAS Webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>

MassDEP Factsheet on PFAS for Consumers: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>

MassDEP Factsheet - PFAS in Private Wells: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-in-private-well-drinking-water-supplies-faq>

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Factsheet on PFAS: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-in-drinking-water>

Be Well Informed: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/understanding-my-laboratory-results>

MassDEP Private Well webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/private-wells>

Private Wells PFAS Sampling Program 21E Questions and Answers: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/private-wells-pfas-sampling-program-21e-questions-and-answers>

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