PFAS Q & A

What are PFAS?

- Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a family of manmade chemicals that have been widely used in many consumer products. They first appeared as nonstick coatings in the 1940s. Since then, these chemicals have been used in stain- and water-resistant products, protective coatings, firefighting foam, waterproof fabrics, and many other products you may use, or come in contact with, on a daily basis.
- PFAS are labeled as "forever" chemicals because they don't decompose naturally.
- PFAS can make its way into water and soil from past industrial disposal or spills.
- PFAS have been found in rainwater samples taken around the world.
- You cannot see, taste, or smell PFAS in drinking water.

The MN Department of Health is testing community water systems throughout the state for PFAS.
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/pfasmap.html

How did PFAS get in the water?

The City's water sources come from an aquafer that contains three wells. These contaminants are not caused by the City or its water treatment system. PFAS contaminants enter the water system through ground water. There are many products consumers and businesses use that contain PFAS. It is the use of these products that impacts the level of PFAS found in our water. The City of Waite Park and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency are currently investigating the source(s) of PFAS contamination.

Are there any health effects related to PFAS?

- There are many different PFAS, and each may have varying roles for different health effects.
- Determining whether PFAS chemicals cause health effects in humans, and at what levels, is an active area of research and we hope to know more in the future.
- Several PFAS have been associated with a variety of human health effects, most of the evidence comes from two PFAS chemicals (PFOA and PFOS). The most consistently observed effects are immune suppression (e.g., decreased antibodies to vaccinations), changes in liver function (e.g., higher cholesterol, elevated liver enzymes) and lower birth weight. One PFAS, PFOA, has also been associated with kidney cancer. Other factors, such as diet and genetics, can also cause many of these effects.
- Drinking water at or below a Health Risk Index (HRI) of 1.0 presents little or no risk of health effects. Currently, the HRI for Waite Park water is slightly above 1.0.

See the PFAS Dashboard link below for details on the Waite Park water sampling results.
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/pfasmap.html

How is the City of Waite Park going to deal with PFAS?

- All information on the level of PFAS found when sampling the drinking water will be shared on the link below.
  https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/pfasmap.html
- Using source water with the lowest levels of PFAS.
- Investigate and implement additional water treatment processes that will remove PFAS from our water system. This will take some time to complete.
- It is important to note: to reduce or eliminate PFAS from our water, will require the cooperation from community businesses and residents to find sources of the contaminants.

In the meantime, how can I remove PFAS from my water? What should I buy or what is recommended?

- Filters containing activated carbon, or reverse osmosis membranes, have been shown to be effective at removing PFAS from water supplies.
    - Filtered water from a pitcher, faucet, or whole-house filter system with a certified filter technology. A granular activated carbon (GAC) filter that meets ANSI/NSF Standard 53 or a reverse osmosis (RO) filter, with an included GAC component, can filter out PFAS.
    - Point-of-use (POU) systems come in a range of sizes, and some require a licensed plumber or water treatment specialist, to be installed properly.
    - There are also small POU systems that homeowners can install themselves on a faucet for drinking and cooking water.
    - Purified or filtered bottled water.
- All home water treatment units require regular maintenance to work properly.
- Home water treatment units that are not properly maintained will lose their effectiveness over time.
- Other types of common home water treatment systems, such as water softeners, are **not** likely to remove PFAS.
- Boiling water will **not** remove PFAS.

Evaluation of point of use in-home filters for PFAS:
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/hazardous/docs/pfas/poueval.pdf

Is it safe to drink the city water, if I do not get a filter system of my own?

- MDH has developed health-based guidance values to represent levels for several PFAS in drinking water. The guidance values are levels that MDH considers safe for all people to consume, including sensitive populations. The guidance values apply to short time periods, as well as a lifetime of exposure.
- Currently, the City of Waite Park water is slightly above the MDH health risk index (HRI) level.

Consult the MDH web pages to find information about health risks related to PFAS.
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/hazardous/topics/pfcs.html#safelevels

How can I reduce PFAS in my daily life?

- PFAS chemicals can be found in many products. You can reduce your exposure by avoiding the following:
    - Some grease-resistant paper, fast food containers/wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, and candy wrappers
    - Nonstick cookware
    - Stain resistant coatings used on carpets, upholstery, and other fabrics
    - Water resistant clothing
    - Some cleaning products
    - Personal care products (shampoo, dental floss) and cosmetics (nail polish, eye makeup)
    - Paints, varnishes, and sealants
    - Household dust can be a significant source of PFAS exposure, especially for infants and young children.
    - Indoor sources (e.g., consumer products, floor waxes, stain resistant treated upholstery and carpets) contribute most to PFAS in house dust.

MDH has a factsheet on reducing exposures to PFAS located at:
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/hazardous/docs/pfas/pfasreducingexp.pdf

Another source that may also be helpful is:
https://pfas-exchange.org/wp-content/uploads/PFAS-Tip-Sheet_Reduce-exposure-web.pdf

Are Waite Park restaurants aware of the PFAS issue and are they filtering their water?

- The area businesses have been provided information on the water quality.
- If you want information about filtration at a specific business, it is best to inquire with them directly.
- Businesses are not required to filter water.

Can PFAS be absorbed through my skin?

- Based on the limited information we have; it appears that absorption through skin is not a significant exposure route.

Do PFAS present any greater health risk to my baby?

- Infants that consume infant formula mixed with water containing PFAS may have a higher exposure to PFAS, since babies drink more water per body weight than adults.
- To lower your baby's exposure to PFAS, consider using bottled water or water that has been filtered to remove PFAS.

Do PFAS present any health risk to my pets?

- The present levels of PFAS in Waite Park's water should not pose a health risk to pets.

Would PFAS affect my plumbing?

- It is unlikely that PFAS will penetrate plastic pipes.
- PFAS will not cause physical damage to your plumbing.

Would PFAS affect my clothing?

- Washing clothes in water containing PFAS should not affect clothing.
- PFAS are used in manufacturing to treat clothing that is marketed as water and stain resistant.

Will my houseplants or vegetable gardens be affected by PFAS?

- The present levels of PFAS in Waite Park's water should not affect houseplants or vegetables.

MDH does have a factsheet on PFAS and homegrown garden produce, which can be found at:
https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/hazardous/docs/pfas/pfasgardproduce.pdf

If you have any additional questions, please contact the MN Dept of Health at:

(651) 201-4897 or toll-free 1(800) 657-3908

Or

email at: health.hazard@state.mn.us