Frequently Asked Questions: PFAS and Public Water Supplies

Q: Is PFAS in our local public drinking water?

A*:* After following a series of testing protocols in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and awaiting laboratory test results, we have learned of the presence PFAS chemical compounds (PFAS6) at levels above the state standard of 20 parts per trillion in the following water source(s):

Bigelow Rd well measured 24.2 ppt on 8/25/21

Q: What are you doing to address the presence of PFAS?

A: As a result of the findings and in conjunction with MassDEP, Webster Water Departmment has taken the following actions:

- We have removed the impacted water source from service isolating it from our customers
- We will continue to monitor raw water samples to determine our next steps which could include treatment
- Please note since the beginning of the year this source has been producing approximately 10% of our daily usage with the other 90% coming from our new state of the art water filtration plant at Memorial Beach which delivers water well below the PFAS limit
- We are working with our Engineering firm to find a cost effective solution for the Bigelow Rd well at this time

Q: Is my water safe to drink?

A: Yes your water is safe to drink. Initial testing in April and May of this year showed results well below the limit. It was only recent tests that revealed results over the limit and Webster Water Department removed the impacted source from service. We continue to deliver finished water from our Memorial Beach WTP well below the MassDEP 20 ppt limit.

Our commitment is to delivering safe and reliable water, and yes, the water is safe and meets state and federal standards for safe drinking water. According to the latest testing, the levels were at Memorial Beach on 8/25 were 10.4 ppt.

When a water source contains PFAS6 at levels above 20 ppt, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection recommends consumers in a sensitive subgroup (pregnant or nursing women, infants and people diagnosed by their health care provider to have a compromised immune system), are advised not to consume, drink, or cook with water when the level of PFAS6 is above 20 ppt.

For consumers not in one of those categories, there is no recommendation by MassDEP to not consume the water and continue to use it. It is important to consider the standard is applicable to a lifetime of consuming the water, and shorter duration exposure presents less risk for most of the population. MassDEP also notes "that consuming water with PFAS6 above the recommended limits does not mean that adverse effects will occur."

All public drinking water sources in Massachusetts are tested regularly to ensure they meet or exceed state standards. When a water source is found to have a contaminant in quantities above state standards, the utility, in partnership with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, will take steps necessary to address the problem.

At this point, we are looking into solutions. As we seek remedies to lower the PFAS6 levels, it is necessary for us to continue to provide the public water supply and inform the public of MassDEP's recommendation that pregnant women, nursing mothers and infants, and people diagnosed by their health care provider to have a compromised immune system not consume the water.

Q: What are PFAS?

A: PFAS are a family of manmade chemicals used for non-stick coatings and firefighting foams. Their manufacturing was discontinued in the U.S. about 30 years ago, but they may still be used in imported products. PFAS are resilient and do not degrade easily in soil and water. As a result, they are widely found in the environment where they migrate to the food supply and drinking water.

The PFAS6 Regulated Under MassDEP's Drinking Water Standard

PFOA	perfluorooctanoic acid
PFOS	perfluorooctane sulfonic acid
PFHxS	perfluorohexane sulfonic acid
PFNA	perfluorononanoic acid
PFHpA	perfluoroheptanoic acid
PFDA	perfluorodecanoic acid

Q: What are the health concerns regarding PFAS?

A: As of now, the MassDEP recommends pregnant women, nursing mothers and infants, and people diagnosed by their health care provider to have a compromised immune system avoid consuming water with PFAS6 above 20 ppt. For those affected, alternate sources of water may include in-home filtration systems or bottled water tested for PFAS.

MassDEP says that "consuming water with PFAS6 above the recommended limits does not mean that adverse effects will occur. The degree of risk depends on the level of the

chemicals and the duration of exposure.'' Most people have been exposed to PFAS as it is prevalent in homes and the environment due to its widespread use in consumer products and industrial uses.

There are scientific studies that suggest potential links between exposure to certain PFAS in the environment and health effects. The studies have looked at the effects on the development of fetuses and infants, the thyroid, the liver, kidneys, hormone levels and the immune system, as well as if a cancer risk exists for people exposed to levels well above the drinking water standard.

MassDEP and CDC both note more research is needed and ongoing, and it is important to remember consuming water with high PFAS6 levels does not mean adverse effects will occur. As we await further scientific study, MassDEP has acted to set a drinking water standard, and we are working in the best interest of our consumers to lower PFAS6 levels below 20 ppt.

Q: How are people exposed to PFAS?

A: People are exposed to PFAS from many sources, far beyond their drinking water. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, people are exposed to PFAS by food packaged in materials containing PFAS, processed with equipment that used PFAS, or grown in PFAS-contaminated soil or water. People may also have been exposed to PFAS in the workplace through production facilities or industries that involve chrome plating, electronics manufacturing, and oil recovery.

In addition, many commercial household products contained PFAS, and if made outside the United States, may still be made with PFAS. Those include stain- and water-repellant fabrics, nonstick cookware and other products, polishes, waxes, paints, and cleaning products, to name a few.

When found in drinking water, it is often the result of PFAS discharged from a nearby manufacturer, landfill, wastewater treatment plant, or firefighter training facility that used fire-suppressing foams.

In the United States and other industrialized countries, most people have concentrations of these compounds in their blood. The good news is the levels have been dropping as use of certain PFAS have been discontinued. A 2015-2016 federal study found an 82% drop in PFOS and 70% drop in PFOA in the general population, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Q: How long has PFAS been in our water supply?

A: Relatively recent advances in laboratory testing now enable us to test for PFAS compounds at extremely low levels. Water systems who tested negative for PFAS at parts per billion may now test positive at parts per trillion. However, these tests do not tell us when the PFAS entered the water source or from where. This issue continues to

develop and there is much we still do not know with certainty, but as we learn new information, we will share it with you.