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**Private well owners in Eau Claire County can be considered
for free drinking water PFAS testing**

Expanded effort to research PFAS in the county prompted by findings in some private wells

Eau Claire, August 2, 2024 – The Eau Claire City-County Health Department is partnering with researchers from UW-Eau Claire to offer a limited number of free private well water tests for PFAS, commonly referred to as “forever chemicals.”

PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are found in everyday items like fast food wrappers, nonstick cookware, cosmetics, water-resistant clothing, and household stain repellants. PFAS have also been detected in the environment, including surface water and groundwater, because of this widespread use. Research indicates that high levels of PFAS can have harmful health effects.

In late 2023, the Eau Claire City-County Health Department was notified of a rural drinking water well that was tested and found to contain PFAS above recommended health levels. The Health Department notified nearby well owners of this detection and encouraged PFAS testing for other wells in the area. Since then, 38 private wells have been tested for PFAS and 14 have contained PFAS above the recommended health level.

The Health Department and researchers from the UW-Eau Claire Geology and Environmental Studies Department are now working to sample more private drinking water wells around Eau Claire County. Our goal is to better understand the extent of PFAS in private drinking water wells. Researchers will also collect samples to be tested for nitrate, bacteria, arsenic, lead, and other parameters. This opportunity will not last long.

Private well owners who are interested in having their drinking water considered for testing should fill out an interest form online at bit.ly/pfasform-ec or call 715-836-4300. If selected, there will be no cost to the well owner for this testing service. UWEC researchers or Health Department staff will collect the water samples in person, and samples will be analyzed at the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene. Researchers plan to sample at least 70 private wells across the county to ensure a variety of locations are tested, so not all interested private well owners may be able to have their water tested during this project.

“The only way to know the quality of well water is to test. Our hope is that this project will help individual well owners take action to reduce their PFAS exposure and determine areas of the county that need further testing,” said Matt Steinbach, Environmental Sciences Division Manager at the Health Department. “Exposure to unsafe levels of PFAS in well water can contribute to adverse health effects, and we want well owners to have the information they need to make decisions about testing and possible treatment of their water.”

The Health Department has been coordinating with the WI Department of Natural Resources regarding the PFAS levels in private wells tested in Eau Claire County. WI DNR supports private well owners participating in this sampling program and will continue to serve as a resource for local officials investigating PFAS in groundwater as well as households that may be impacted by PFAS in their drinking water.

Private well sampling is expected to begin this summer and conclude by the end of 2024. The project is funded by American Rescue Plan Act funding from Eau Claire County and the Health Department. For more information, please visit the [Eau Claire City-County Health Department PFAS website](#).

Frequently Asked Questions About PFAS

What is the source of PFAS that has been detected in groundwater in Eau Claire County? The source of PFAS that has been detected in wells in rural Eau Claire County is not yet known. It is anticipated that more testing will reveal PFAS in more wells throughout the county.

How can I be exposed to PFAS? These substances have water, oil, and heat resistance properties, and are found in a variety of products that many people use daily. You can be exposed through contaminated drinking water; eating fish with high levels of PFAS; eating food packaged in material made with PFAS; swallowing contaminated soil or dust; or by using products that contain PFAS, like nonstick cookware, stain, water repellent sprays for fabric, ski wax, and many others. Using fewer of these products can help you to lower your exposure to PFAS.

What possible health effects can be caused by exposure to PFAS? Research indicates that high levels of some PFAS may increase the risk of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and some cancers, and decrease infant birthweight or the body's response to vaccines. Not all PFAS have the same effects on health. Read more at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/chemical/pfas.htm>.

My water looks and tastes clean. Should I still get my well tested? There are many common contaminants that don't change the taste, look, or smell of drinking water. Water with high levels of PFAS, nitrate, bacteria, and some metals may still taste, smell, or look clean. For people that rely on private wells for drinking water, the only way to know what is in their drinking water is to test.

If I'm not selected, how can I get a test? Private well owners can also get their well tested at their own cost through the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene. Read more at <https://www.slh.wisc.edu/environmental/pfas/> or call the Health Department if you have questions at 715-839-2870.

What will happen with my well if I test? You will receive a report with the results from your well. If your well tests above the recommended health level of PFAS or other contaminants, the Eau Claire City-County Health Department can recommend options for alternate water sources or in-home water treatment. It is entirely your choice if you would like to treat your water.

Where can I find more information?

- [Wisconsin Department of Health Services PFAS information](#)
- [Department of Natural Resources PFAS information and data viewer](#)
- [Wisconsin PFAS Shallow Groundwater Study information](#)

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