

## *At least 60% of US population may face ‘forever chemicals’ in tap water, tests suggest*



*Federal tests of one-third of water systems find 70 million Americans exposed to PFAS – suggesting 200 million affected overall*

[Tom Perkins](#), Tue 20 Feb 2024 07.00 EST Last modified on Tue 20 Feb 2024 09.56 EST

About 70 million people are exposed to toxic [PFAS](#) “forever chemicals” in US drinking water, new testing from the Environmental Protection Agency has found.

But the testing completed to date has only checked about one-third of the nation’s public water systems, meaning the agency is on pace to find over 200 million people are exposed, or at least 60% of the US population.

The figure does not include private wells, and the federal government previously estimated about 8 million people who draw water from those are exposed to PFAS.

The EPA’s continuing testing is the first comprehensive nationwide assessment aimed at understanding the scale of PFAS contamination in US drinking water. So far, the government figures match up with independent [estimates](#) that found about 200 million people drink tainted water, and the widespread contamination cuts across geographic and socioeconomic boundaries.

See more here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/pfas>



## [The race to destroy the toxic ‘forever chemicals’ polluting our world](#)

“As we get more data in from water systems, we’re seeing PFAS is pretty prevalent in US drinking water supplies, and we’re seeing more and more people are exposed in states across the US,” said Jared Hayes, a policy analyst with the Environmental Working Group non-profit, which tracks PFAS pollution.

PFAS are a class of more than 15,000 compounds typically [used across dozens of industries](#) to make products water-, stain- or heat-resistant. They are in everyday consumer products such as stain guards, cookware and waterproof clothing and are common in industrial manufacturing.

The chemicals are linked to cancer, birth defects, liver disease, thyroid problems, decreased immunity, hormone disruption and a range of other serious health issues. PFAS are dubbed “forever chemicals” because they do not naturally break down, and they also easily move through the environment, often ending up in drinking water.

The EPA’s new data includes testing completed in 2023, and more tests are planned for this year and 2025. The findings come as the EPA works toward finalizing [limits for six kinds of PFAS compounds](#) in drinking water, and amid a broader push by the Biden administration to rein in forever chemical pollution.

The nationwide testing does not need to be complete for the proposed drinking water limits to be made law, but the findings underscore the situation’s urgency, Hayes said.

“The whole thing is really showing we need to get drinking water standards in place soon because of how prevalent and toxic PFAS are, and because they are everywhere,” Hayes said. “We need leadership from the Biden administration and EPA.” Public health advocates expect the agency to finalize the rules before the November election.

The findings also show 60 million people are exposed to PFOA and PFOS, two of the most dangerous PFAS compounds, at levels above the EPA’s proposed limits. Once the limits are made law, utilities will be required to install technology, such as granular activated carbon or reverse osmosis systems, that will remove most PFAS.

The federal government has made billions of dollars available for utilities to install the systems and ease the burden on ratepayers, and chemical companies that produce PFAS have so far been court ordered [to pay](#) about \$14bn toward new systems.