

NSW Health Expert Advisory Panel Opines PFAS Blood Tests Offer No Clinical Benefit

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Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a large family of human-made chemicals developed for their durability and resistance to heat, water, and oil. They have been widely used since the mid-20th century in products ranging from firefighting foams to nonstick cookware and water-repellent fabrics. Because they do not easily degrade, PFAS can remain in the environment. This persistence has raised questions about long-term exposure, prompting health agencies and communities alike to examine the risks and appropriate responses. Concerns over exposure have surfaced in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales (NSW), after PFAS was detected in local water supplies. According to community advocates, over two dozen citizens paid privately for blood tests, with costs reported at up to \$500 each. The goal for some was to compare their results to those in other parts of Australia where contamination has been documented. Yet, a new report from the NSW Health Expert Advisory Panel underscores that such tests provide no clinical benefit.

Findings of the NSW Expert Advisory Panel

On August 12, 2025, NSW Health Expert Advisory Panel released its final report on PFAS. The panel, established by Chief Health Officer Dr. Kerry Chant and composed of specialists in cancer, heart and hormone health, epidemiology, pathology, and public health, examined the body of research on PFAS exposure. Its conclusion was that health impacts from PFAS "appear to be small." While the panel recognized that some studies suggest possible links to conditions such as cancer, thyroid disease, and cardiovascular problems, it emphasized that results have been inconsistent and do not show clear patterns based on dose or exposure levels.

The panel specifically addressed blood testing, finding that while tests are commercially available, they do not assist in patient care. Because most people already have detectable levels of PFAS in their blood and there are thousands of PFAS variants, the blood test results cannot predict present or future health outcomes. Notably, the report cautioned that test results could instead cause unnecessary worry and potentially lead to interventions that may do more harm than good.

Broader Policy Landscape

The panel acknowledged its stance differs from guidance issued by the U.S. National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, which recommended that blood tests can play a role in clinical care. However, the NSW report noted this guidance has not been adopted by U.S. health agencies, such as the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. NSW Health has accepted all of the panel's recommendations. The report advises that general practitioners can best support patients concerned about PFAS exposure by focusing on preventive health measures for common conditions like cardiovascular disease and cancers, rather than relying on blood testing.

The report reflects a cautious, evidence-based approach: while recognizing community concerns, it emphasizes that PFAS testing does not provide useful clinical guidance. For regulators and health agencies, it highlights the challenge of addressing community apprehension while avoiding interventions that are not supported by science. For companies and governments facing potential litigation, the findings reinforce that blood testing does not establish health outcomes and thus, should not form the basis for potential compensation or medical monitoring claims.