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Page 1 of 1

Physician Guidance for Managing Patients' PFAS Concerns

The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) continues to work with the Michigan Departments of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Health and Human Services (MDHHS) on the public health response to elevated levels of Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the drinking water of some Kent County residents. It is likely that local physicians will receive questions from patients who live in the affected area regarding health conditions associated with exposure to the drinking water and what can be done to assess their risk. While more detailed physician guidance is available from the CDC (https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/docs/pfas_clinician_fact_sheet_508.pdf), this document provides basic guidance to aid in your conversations with concerned patients.

What are PFAS?

PFAS are synthetic chemicals commonly used for waterproofing, non-stick surfaces, stain resistant treatments, and other uses. Common examples include perfluorocarboxylic acid (PFOA), and perfluorosulfonates (PFOS, PFHxS). The major human exposure pathway is ingestion, most commonly from contaminated drinking water. EPA guidance recommends the total PFAS levels in drinking water be less than 70 ppt (parts per trillion).

Health Effects

The C8 Health Project included 69,030 adult persons exposed to high levels of PFAS over 50 years. Based largely on this study, CDC guidance lists the following as **potential** health effects:

- Thyroid function abnormality
- High cholesterol
- Ulcerative colitis
- Testicular cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Pregnancy induced hypertension
- Elevated liver enzymes
- High uric acid

Evidence of causation of these effects is not conclusive, and there is no way to know if PFAS exposure caused or contributed to these health problems.

PFAS serum testing

- Not routinely recommended.
- Regardless of the degree of elevation, does not predict or rule out development of future health problems.
- Cannot be interpreted and used in patient care.

Other lab testing

- Not routinely recommended, but should be individualized to the patient.
- Lab testing, if any, may include thyroid function, liver function, uric acid, and cholesterol.

Water use

Exposure can be reduced by using an alternative water source for drinking, food preparation, cooking, brushing teeth or any activity that might result in ingestion of water.

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