

Five things to know about toxic 'forever chemicals' now limited by California law

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A growing body of research is drawing attention to health threats posed

by human-made chemicals called "forever chemicals," which are targeted by a new California law requiring manufacturers to reduce their use in food packaging and cookware.

Scientist Max Aung, an assistant professor of environmental health at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, warns about the chemicals, known as PFAS: "There is increasing evidence in [human studies](#) and experimental models that PFAS are linked to several chronic health conditions, including cancer, liver disease and type 2 diabetes.

"These findings, coupled with increasing community concerns about PFAS contamination, underscore the need to use the best available science and multisector partnerships to reduce exposure and protect human health and the environment."

Aung shared these five other things to know about these chemicals, or PFAS:

1. PFAS is an abbreviation for "per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances." These are sometimes called forever chemicals because they break down very slowly and accumulate in the environment and in human tissue.
2. Exposure to PFAS is [connected to liver damage](#), according to one USC study, and may be behind the dramatic rise in cases of nonalcoholic fatty [liver disease](#). The chemicals also pose risks to the immune and nervous systems. Another study co-led by USC found PFAS exposures linked to women previously diagnosed with [melanoma and reproductive cancers](#).
3. Exposures during pregnancy and [early childhood](#) may have long-term implications for child health. Babies may be exposed in utero and through breast milk. Aung has a grant to study PFAS

exposure during pregnancy and early indicators of brain development in newborns.

4. PFAS are present in countless consumer products ranging from fast-food wrappers, paper plates and non-stick cookware to stain-resistant carpet and waterproof clothing. PFAS are added to food packaging to make them more water- or grease-resistant.
5. Industrial manufacturing of PFAS has contributed to widespread contamination in drinking and groundwater systems across California. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PFAS are detectable in the blood of nearly all U.S. adults.

Provided by University of Southern California

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