

Blood tests offered in New Mexico amid query into 'forever chemical' contamination at military bases

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Hundreds of residents and personnel stationed at a U.S. Air Force base in eastern New Mexico will be able to have their blood tested as state

officials expand their investigation into contamination from a group of compounds known as "forever chemicals."

The New Mexico Environment Department announced Tuesday that it is searching for a contractor that can conduct the tests in the spring. The idea is to host two events where up to 500 adult volunteers living within a few miles of Cannon Air Force Base will have a small amount of blood drawn and tested for PFAS.

Surveys also will be done to determine any potential exposure for those living near the base.

PFAS, which stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, have been linked to cancer and other health problems in humans. They are called "forever chemicals" because they don't degrade in the environment and remain in the bloodstream.

The chemicals have been [detected at hundreds of military installations](#) across the United States, resulting in what will be billions of dollars in cleanup costs. New Mexico officials said contamination at Cannon and at Holloman Air Force Base in southern New Mexico already has cost the state over \$8 million in site assessment, cleanup, litigation and other costs.

The Air Force has spent more than \$67 million on its response to PFAS contamination at Cannon so far.

State Environment Secretary James Kenney said PFAS chemicals are used in so many [consumer products](#) that it's likely most New Mexicans will have some amount in their blood. Those who live near [military bases](#) may be at higher risk, he said.

"This data will help us quantify if there are greater risks and inform how

we better protect New Mexicans," Kenney said in a statement.

In early 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed the first federal limits on forever chemicals in drinking water, limiting them to the lowest level that tests can detect. New Mexico had previously petitioned the agency to treat PFAS as hazardous.

The state of New Mexico and the U.S. Department of Defense have been at odds over responsibilities for mitigating PFAS contamination at installations including Cannon and Holloman Air Force bases.

Near Cannon, the Highland Dairy in Clovis euthanized more than 3,000 cows in 2022 after confirmation of PFAS contamination in the herd—and the milk the cows produced.

Officials at Cannon held a meeting in November to update the public on their efforts. They are in the process of determining the nature and extent of contamination on and off the base. The work has included soil and [water samples](#) as well as the installation of monitoring wells. Plans also call for eventually building a treatment plant.

Last year, the New Mexico Environment Department also offered to test for PFAS in private domestic wells across the state. Results from that sampling effort, done with the help of the U.S. Geological Survey, showed that PFAS compounds were not detected in the majority of wells tested.

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