

'Forever chemicals' blood tests in Belgium over polluted water

November 14 2023



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Belgium's southern Wallonia region pledged Tuesday to offer free blood tests for residents to measure their possible exposure to PFAS "forever chemicals" amid a scandal over polluted drinking water.

Local authorities have been rocked after an investigation by the RTBF news outlet last week revealed they had ignored warnings over elevated chemical levels in tap water in several districts.

The pollution has been linked to fire-fighting foam and aircraft de-icing products used at a US Air Force base in Chievres, near Ath.

According to the investigation, water consumed between autumn 2021 and spring 2023 by thousands of people had a concentration of toxic chemicals at times six times above the European limit.

Found in [everyday products](#) such as non-stick frying pans and waterproof clothing, Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) take a very long time to break down in nature and have been linked to cancer, infertility and [environmental damage](#).

Faced with growing concern in Wallonia, the region's environment minister Celine Tellier told a stormy hearing before the local parliament that levels measured in tap water were now "well below the norm".

She said blood tests would be offered to anyone who volunteers and as a "precautionary measure" residents of seven communes, including Ath and Mons, were advised not to consume locally-produced eggs and vegetables.

The initial alert on [water contamination](#) in the region dates back to 2017.

As early as 2018, the US Army urged soldiers to consume only bottled water.

Tellier said her office had not received any information about an "imminent threat to health".

But she added that an official had been sacked for overlooking an email from a water company last year.

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Citation: 'Forever chemicals' blood tests in Belgium over polluted water (2023, November 14)
retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-11-chemicals-blood-belgium-polluted.html>

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