

Public Water Systems and NYS Drinking Water Standards for PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-Dioxane

- On August 26, 2020, NYS adopted new drinking water standards for public water systems that set maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) of 10 parts per trillion (10 ppt) each for perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), and 1 part per billion (1 ppb) for 1,4-dioxane.
- MCLs require public water systems to regularly monitor for contaminants, notify health departments and the public of confirmed exceedances, and work with health departments on a compliance timetable and plan to bring water systems into compliance.
- The MCLs for PFOA, PFOS and 1,4 dioxane are among the most protective for these contaminants in public water of any state. NYS is the first state to develop an MCL for 1,4-dioxane.
- Because MCLs are set at levels with a large margin of protection, an exceedance of an MCL does not mean that water is unsafe for use while the public water system takes actions to reduce the levels.

About Drinking Water Standards and MCLs

- A maximum contaminant level, or MCL, is the highest level of a contaminant allowed in drinking water delivered by public water systems. They are enforceable regulatory limits.
- MCLs are set far below levels that cause health effects. These levels are set to also consider the availability of drinking water treatment technologies, the ability to accurately measure the contaminant, and the cost associated with removing the contaminant to acceptable levels.

What Public Water Systems Must Do

- Beginning August 26, 2020, public water systems will begin monitoring for PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-dioxane. The largest water systems, which serve 10,000 or more people, must begin sampling by October 25, 2020. Mid-sized systems that serve between 3,300 and 9,999 people must begin sampling by November 25, 2020. Water systems that serve less than 3,300 people must begin sampling by February 25, 2021.
- As with all MCLs, water systems must notify their local health department about any exceedances and if there is a confirmed MCL exceedance, the public water system will work with their local health department to notify the public and develop a course of action and timetable to reduce levels below the MCL.
- Some water systems will need to make significant infrastructure upgrades to their water treatment processes and these projects could take several years to complete.

MCLs and Health Risks

- MCLs are set at levels well below those that have caused health effects in laboratory animal studies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and DOH rely largely on animal studies to set drinking water standards because controlled laboratory experiments provide the strongest evidence for understanding risks of health effects in people. Human studies are also reviewed in setting MCLs, but these studies are less controlled and therefore have more uncertainties.
- Because MCLs are set at levels with a large margin of protection, an exceedance of an MCL does not signal an immediate health risk; it signals the need for water systems to take actions to reduce exposures.

For Questions and More information

- For more information about PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-dioxane in the environment visit www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/emergingcontaminants.pdf
- For questions about levels of contaminants in your public drinking water, contact your local water supplier. You can find their information on your water bill or look them up at www.water.ny.gov
- For more information about the MCLs or advice about your drinking water, contact your local health department (find their information at www.health.ny.gov/environmentalcontacts) or contact the DOH at bpwsp@health.ny.gov
- For questions about specific health concerns, talk to your health care provider who is most familiar with your health history and can provide advice and assistance about understanding how drinking water may affect your personal health.