

PFAS Foam Questions and Answers

What should I know about foam on lakes and rivers?

Foam can often be found on Michigan's lakes and rivers year round. Foam can occur naturally or because of pollution in the water. Natural foam can form from decomposing plants and algae and could contain bacteria. Chemicals, like surfactants or detergents, in the water also cause foam on lakes and rivers. To best protect your health, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) recommends rinsing any lake or river foam off your skin.

What does naturally occurring foam look like?

Naturally occurring foam:

- Is off-white and/or brown
- Often piles up in bays, eddies, or river barriers such as dams
- May have an earthy or fishy smell

What should I know about foam with per and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, in it?

MDHHS recommends you avoid foam on lakes and rivers impacted by a PFAS contamination site. Foam on these lakes and rivers can have much higher amounts of PFAS than the water. Swallowing foam with PFAS could be a risk to your health. To locate known PFAS sites, visit [Michigan.gov/PFASResponse](https://www.michigan.gov/PFASResponse).

PFAS do not move easily through the skin, but it's always best to rinse off after contact with foam and to bathe or shower after the day's outdoor activities. There is no new scientific information on how PFAS moves through the skin. However, MDHHS evaluation of how young children might get foam on them at the beach finds a health risk could exist from repeated, prolonged whole-body contact with foam containing high amounts of PFAS. Repeated prolonged contact is 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, 3 months of a year, representing a summer season. MDHHS' recommendation to avoid foam with PFAS is protective of everyone, including young children.

What does PFAS foam look like?

PFAS foam:

- Can be bright white
- Is usually lightweight
- Can be sticky
- Tends to pile up like shaving cream
- Can blow onto the beach

What about swimming or bathing in water that has PFAS?

Swimming or bathing in water that has PFAS in it is not a health concern. The amount of PFAS in lake or river water is typically much less than the amount in foam. Although swallowing PFAS is the main way to get it in your body, an occasional swallow of lake or river water is not a health concern. None of this information changes recommendations for people's water used at home.

The amount of PFAS in lake and river water and in foam matters in determining if a health concern exists. MDHHS will continue to evaluate surface water and foam data and will issue further recommendations if necessary.

Has MDHHS changed its recommendation about PFAS-containing Lake or River foam?

No, MDHHS has previously recommended if you get PFAS lake or river foam on your skin, rinse it off. MDHHS has given this advice about lakes and rivers impacted by PFAS contamination sites.

What scientific information does MDHHS use to make recommendations about foam?

ATSDR released new science during 2018, when combined with the PFAS foam levels seen in Michigan, supports the MDHHS recommendation to avoid PFAS-containing lake or river foam, and rinse it off if it gets on your skin. MDHHS now has more foam data from waterbodies near multiple PFAS sites around the state. The amount of PFAS in foam can change and is sometimes very high.

ATSDR has released new information on the amount of PFAS that could be a risk to human health. The CDC's information is draft, but recommended for use by ATSDR when following the ATSDR health assessment process. MDHHS reviewed these values and used them to evaluate the amount of PFAS in foam and whether it could be a health risk. MDHHS along with state and federal partners are continuing to review the best available science on PFAS. MDHHS will update recommendations if necessary.

Is MDHHS issuing this advice statewide?

MDHHS is issuing this advice for waterbodies that are known or expected to be impacted by PFAS contamination sites. More information is available on the Michigan.gov/PFASResponse website.

Will you be posting signs about foam on rivers or lakes that have PFAS?

MDHHS is working with the local health departments that have PFAS sites within their jurisdictions. Based on the PFAS levels in foam on local lakes and rivers, the health departments may issue advisories and post signs about the advisories along rivers or lakes.

There are existing health advisories for PFAS foam for these waterbodies:

- Van Etten Lake, Oscoda
- Lake Margrethe, Grayling
- Rogue River, Rockford
- Thornapple River, Grand Rapids
- Huron River, Southeast Michigan

Where can I find more information about PFAS and foam?

For more information, visit Michigan.gov/PFASResponse and go to the PFAS Foam button or call MDHHS at 800-648-6942.