



September 25, 2020

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II regarding concerns about potential risks the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) may pose for individuals who have been exposed to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This is an important issue for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and there is more that we can learn through further research. I am responding on behalf of Secretary Azar; the National Institutes of Health will respond separately.

CDC and ATSDR are assessing the intersection between PFAS exposure and COVID-19, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). CDC is currently implementing a study that will look at COVID-19 among healthcare personnel and first responders. As part of this study, we are planning to measure PFAS serum concentrations in participants to determine the association between serum PFAS concentrations and the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and subsequent COVID-19 illness. The study will also evaluate the association of PFAS levels and antibody response to SARS-CoV-2 infection, and the waning of antibodies over time, which may shed light on the potential impact of PFAS exposure on vaccine response and potential duration of vaccine protection.

We are also exploring how to incorporate investigator-initiated COVID-19 research into the current multi-site PFAS study. The study is in eight states across the U.S. and is a potential mechanism to examine the association between PFAS and COVID-19 in communities. Information could be collected from participants regarding symptoms, exposure, and treatment since January 2020. This information may assist with determining if there is an association between PFAS exposure and antibody responses among those with documented (or presumed) prior SARS-CoV-2 infection. As we have done throughout our work on PFAS, we will ensure that all information provided by participants will be kept confidential and will not be shared without express permission in accordance with applicable federal law.

I deeply appreciate the funding provided through the CARES Act and other supplemental appropriations bills. There are many important research questions that need to be answered and we are considering the appropriate prioritization of research related to COVID-19.

Thank you again for your letter. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Alison Kelly in our CDC Office of Appropriations at (404) 718-8771 or AKelly@cdc.gov. A response is also being sent to the co-signers of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert R. Redfield". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Redfield" clearly legible, followed by a stylized "R" and "W" for the middle initials.

Robert R. Redfield
Director, CDC and
Administrator, ATSDR