

Toxic Fluorinated Chemical (PFAS) Found in Supermarket Foods. Beef, Pork, Chicken, Milk, Bread, Eggs, Green Beans

The chemicals, which have been linked to cancer, weakened childhood immunity and other diseases, were detected in six of 11 food types tested. How Long Has the FDA Known About it

By [EWG](#)

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Laboratory tests conducted nearly 20 years ago that have gone largely unreported found high levels of the toxic fluorinated chemical known as PFAS a number of popular supermarket foods.

The tests were commissioned by 3M, the giant chemical company that first manufactured the two most notorious members of the PFAS family, PFOS and PFOA. Last year, 3M paid \$850 million to settle a lawsuit brought by the state of Minnesota that showed the company [knew for decades](#) about the health hazards of PFAS but hid that information from the public.

According to documents published in June 2001, a [3M-commissioned study](#) found PFOA and PFOS in samples of beef, pork, chicken, milk, green beans, eggs, bread and other foods purchased in six cities in Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. EWG first cited the 3M study in [a Dec., 2002 petition](#) to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, urging inclusion of PFOA and PFOS in the agency's National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals.

Why are PFAS important?

PFAS are found in a wide range of consumer products that people use daily such as cookware, pizza boxes and stain repellants. Most people have been exposed to PFAS. Certain PFAS can accumulate and stay in the human body for long periods of time. There is evidence that exposure to PFAS can lead to adverse health outcomes in humans. The most-studied PFAS chemicals are PFOA and PFOS. Studies indicate that PFOA and PFOS can cause reproductive and developmental, liver and kidney, and immunological effects in laboratory animals. Both chemicals have caused tumors in animals. The most consistent findings are increased cholesterol levels among exposed populations, with more limited findings related to:

- low infant birth weights,
- effects on the immune system,
- cancer (for PFOA), and
- thyroid hormone disruption (for PFOS).

The chemicals, which have been linked to cancer, weakened childhood immunity and other diseases, were detected in six of 11 food types tested. PFOA was found in four of 18 samples of milk, and PFOS or PFOA in three of 18 samples of ground beef. PFOA was also found in samples of green beans, apples and bread. Levels detected ranged from 500 to 14,700 parts per trillion, or ppt.

Last week, EWG and the Environmental Defense Fund [released results](#) of recent tests by the Food and Drug Administration that found PFAS in food, including meat, seafood and dairy products; sweet potatoes; pineapples; leafy greens; and chocolate cake with icing. Those tests found PFOS in nearly half of the samples of meat and seafood, with levels between 134 and 865 ppt, but the FDA had not publicly disclosed the results.

On Tuesday, [Rob Bilott](#), an attorney who has represented tens of thousands of victims of PFAS contamination and who led the legal battle that exposed decades of deception by 3M and other chemical companies, sent [a letter along with the 3M study](#) to an FDA official. Bilott asked whether the FDA was aware of the 2001 study.

“Please also confirm the extent to which FDA (or any other agency) has assessed the impact of the American public having been exposed to such levels of PFAS in food for such an extended period of time, without their knowledge,” Bilott wrote to Timothy Begley of the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

EWG Senior Scientist David Andrews, Ph.D., said the 2001 study is more confirmation that Americans have long been exposed to PFAS in food. The Centers for Disease Control Prevention say that virtually everyone in the country has PFAS in their bodies.

“PFAS chemicals have contaminated the drinking water for at least [19 million Americans](#), but we know that food is one of the main pathways of exposure,” said Andrews. “The FDA needs to come clean and tell us the full extent of PFAS contamination in the American food supply and how long it’s been going on. More importantly, the agency must take immediate action to protect public health from these hazardous compounds.”

[The Intercept’s](#) Sharon Lerner, who has chronicled the PFAS contamination saga and the role 3M, DuPont and others have played in covering it up, [reported on the 2001 study today](#).

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