

April 2024

West Plains PFAS Cancer Cluster Analysis



We take cancer concerns seriously.

If you have concerns about cancer cases in yourself or your family, please contact us using the email or phone number on the back of this page.

Please be prepared to answer questions about the type of cancer, your age, and where you live. We may also ask about your job and smoking habits.



We will continue to monitor the situation.

- The Washington State Cancer Registry (WSCR) releases updated information each year that we can analyze.



Talk to your medical provider if you have health concerns about cancer.

- Public health looks at health trends at a community level. The best person to talk about your individual risk for any health condition is your medical provider.

In April 2023, many West Plains community members shared concerns with us about multiple cancer cases, current and past, in areas where drinking water is contaminated with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). We looked into overall cancer rates on the West Plains. To do this, we followed standard cancer cluster guidelines by looking into overall cancer rates on the West Plains to see if they were higher than we'd expect compared to the state or county.

We have not found unusual cancer rates in the West Plains area at this time.

- We looked at pancreatic cancer, kidney cancer, breast cancer, and testicular cancer from 2011-2020.
- Risk for kidney and testicular cancer has been associated with higher exposure to some PFAS chemicals. Evidence for breast cancer risk is weaker. Pancreatic cancer has been associated with PFAS exposure in animal studies, but not in humans.
- It can take a long time for cancer to develop after any environmental exposure, like PFAS chemicals. However, cancer does not always develop even though exposure to certain PFAS chemicals like perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) is associated with cancer risk.

How Did We Do Our Analysis?

- A first step when identifying a potential cancer cluster is to see if cancer rates (the number of new cancer diagnoses during a set time period in the neighborhood of concern) are higher than we'd expect.
- We used the most recent data (2011-2020) in the Washington State Cancer Registry (WSCR) to see cancer rates.
 - Cancer is a reportable condition in Washington. This means cancer facilities and doctors must report cancer cases to the WSCR. The WSCR also received cancer data from other states on Washington residents who are diagnosed or treated outside our state.
- We looked only at cancer rates in people who lived in the study area shown by the dotted line in Figure 1. We compared these rates to Spokane County, and to the state.
 - Cancer studies may be initiated if a community or neighborhood area's cancer rate is higher than the cancer rate for the county or state.
 - For Washington's average cancer rates (all types of cancer), we would expect to see 26 new cases of cancer each year for every 6,000 people.

Why Didn't We Look at Cancer Deaths?

Looking at just new cases of cancer over a certain time period helps us get a clearer picture of what's going on. Adding in cancer deaths to our analysis makes the picture harder to see, because some cancer deaths are not caused by the cancer itself, but from lack of access to healthcare.

Next Steps

We will continue our annual analysis of the WSCR and work with the West Plains community on their cancer concerns.

If you have ideas you would like to see DOH work on, email or call Jennifer Sabel using the contact info on the bottom right corner of this page. You can also visit our website at www.doh.wa.gov/pfas for more information about PFAS.

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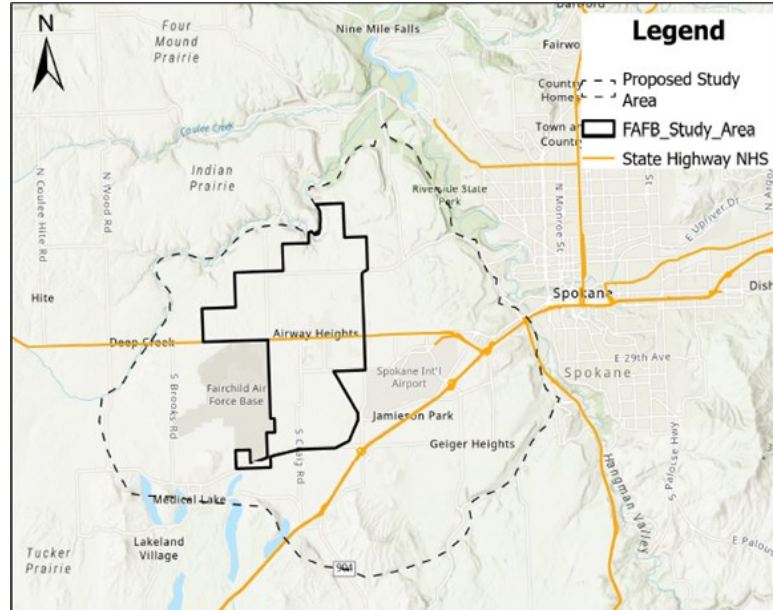


Figure 1. A map showing the area DOH used for the cancer analysis.

What To Do If You're Concerned About Cancer

Follow the below advice if you are concerned about cancer health risk from PFAS exposure:

- **Limit possible PFAS exposure.**

Take advantage of programs offering home water tests and filters. Learn about healthy choices for consumer products in your home.

- **Talk to your medical provider.**

Your medical provider can look at your medical history and give individual advice.

- **Eat a healthy diet.**
- **Exercise regularly.**



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