



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Michigan wins \$4 million CDC grant to improve monitoring of residents' toxic chemical exposure

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is among six state health departments nationwide awarded a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supporting the expansion of statewide toxic chemical biomonitoring.

Biomonitoring is the measurement of environmental chemicals in body tissues or fluids, such as blood or urine, to determine the amount of chemical that actually enters the body. Data collected from biomonitoring helps identify at-risk population groups and assess the effectiveness of interventions to prevent harm.

“This is a great win for all of Michigan and will allow our department to even better assess and address exposure to environmental chemicals in our communities,” said Robert Gordon, MDHHS director. “This knowledge will help us to develop and evaluate ways to both prevent and reduce chemical exposures.”

MDHHS will use the CDC grant funding – about \$4 million over five years – to support two new programs. The first, the Michigan Chemical Exposure Monitoring program (MiChEM), will test for chemicals in a group of adults selected to represent Michigan adults statewide. These chemicals include per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), certain pesticides and heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury and lead.

“Because Michigan has a legacy of industrial activity and a high number of hunters, anglers and private well users, Michigan adults may be exposed to environmental chemicals in different ways than the rest of the U.S. population,” said Matt Geiger, chemistry and toxicology division director at the MDHHS State Public Health Lab and one of the principal investigators on the grant. “MiChEM will help MDHHS establish levels of these chemicals in Michigan adults and help evaluate changes in these levels over time.”

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The second program funded by CDC's grant will measure PFAS among Michigan firefighters to improve understanding of the ways they may be exposed to PFAS on the job. Data from recent scientific studies show that firefighters have levels of certain types of PFAS in their blood that are higher than the national average.

Information gathered from these newly funded efforts will complement other current activities throughout the state to identify groups exposed to environmental chemicals. Such activities include the recent statewide testing of PFAS in Michigan community water supplies, measuring PFAS exposure among people with PFAS in their private wells in northern Kent County and expanded testing for lead and copper in public water supplies under Michigan's revised Lead and Copper Rule.

Biomonitoring is an increasingly important tool in public health. Past biomonitoring efforts in Michigan conducted by the MDHHS State Public Health Lab include a 2003 investigation into dioxin exposure in the Tittabawassee River flood plain; several projects since the 1970s monitoring chemicals in consumers of Great Lakes fish; and long-term monitoring that took place between 1975 and 2001 to track Michiganders' exposure to polybrominated biphenyl (PBB) flame retardants that had been accidentally mixed with cattle feed.

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