

Are there any “Forever Chemicals” in the drinking water?

(Cantonese dialogue with English subtitles)

- Woman A: Isn't my new waterproof jacket pretty?
- Woman B: It's quite pretty.
But I heard that waterproof products
are related to a group of chemicals called PFAS.
- Woman C: Yes.
Apart from waterproof clothing,
PFAS can be found in products such as yoga pants and
non-stick cookware.
- Woman A: I've also heard that
PFAS are known as “Forever Chemicals”.
They're present in the environment and natural water
sources.
There's no way to avoid them.
- Woman B: What should we do?
Wouldn't that be dangerous?
- Super: Dr. WONG Chun Hei
Waterworks Chemist, WSD
- Dr. WONG Chun Hei: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are
fluorinated organic chemicals.
They are water- and oil-repellent
and have very stable chemical structures.
Since their development,
PFAS have been widely used in various products
such as textile, easy-to-clean cookware, waterproof
clothing,
shampoo and other household products.

Their strong carbon-fluorine (C-F) bonds make them hard to break down in nature. Therefore, it is common to find trace amounts of PFAS in natural water sources.

Woman B: Is there any regulation on PFAS?

Dr. WONG Chun Hei: The World Health Organization (WHO) is currently assessing health impacts of PFAS in drinking water. The WHO has not yet established guideline values for PFAS levels in drinking water and there is no consensus of guideline / standard values for PFAS internationally.

Woman A: Are there PFAS in our drinking water?

Dr. WONG Chun Hei: The WSD has been monitoring the levels of PFAS in drinking water since 2013. All test results showed that the PFAS levels in Hong Kong's drinking water have remained extremely low, far below the standard values of PFOS and PFOA developed by other countries. The WSD conducted a review in 2023, in which independent experts analysed local monitoring data and concluded that the risk of PFAS in Hong Kong's drinking water is extremely low.

Woman C: What measures does WSD take to safeguard our drinking water from PFAS?

Dr. Wong Chun Hei: The Dongjiang River Basin is subject to stringent raw water quality management in Chinese Mainland.

Most of the Hong Kong's water gathering grounds are under strict controls to protect water sources from contamination.

The WSD continues to monitor the PFAS levels in both raw water and drinking water, and make timely adjustments to the water treatment processes

to ensure the safety of drinking water.

Additionally, the WSD continues to closely track the latest regulatory measures on PFAS

from the WHO and other countries,

to review and update

the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards as appropriate.

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Water Supplies Department logo
