

Guardian Misleads on PFAS and COVID-19

by American Chemistry | November 17, 2020

PFAS (or Fluorotechnology) are a [large and diverse universe of chemistries](#). Each has its own unique structure, uses and environmental and health profiles. It is very concerning that The Guardian has published a piece seemingly intended to frighten the public while taking the very unscientific and inappropriate approach of lumping all PFAS together as though they are one chemistry and failing to acknowledge the significant uncertainty surrounding the information it provides. This is misleading and inaccurate especially as it relates to the discussion of COVID-19.

The public should know that PFOA and PFOS [have long been voluntarily phased](#) out by our members in the US, Europe and Japan. But that certain other PFAS chemistries in use today have been fully approved for use by various regulatory agencies in the US and Europe, including by the U.S. EPA.

Furthermore, and contrary to what the Guardian reports, many types of PFAS are actively used in the fight *against* COVID-19. For instance, PFAS technology is being used in COVID-19 testing equipment and in the production of ventilators. Another type of PFAS technology is being used in medical garments, hospital gowns, drapes and divider curtains to create a barrier that provides life-saving protection against infections and transmission of diseases in hospitals. In fact, products of chemistry account for more than 25 percent of the material inputs to make life-saving medical equipment, and a full 75 percent of the value of vital cleaning and disinfecting compounds. With some types of PFAS helping to save lives around the world in the midst of this pandemic, the Guardian's accusations actually do a disservice to overall public health.

Despite what is reported in the Guardian, the available human evidence provides conflicting results about the potential effects of exposure to certain PFAS (primarily the legacy products PFOA and PFOS) on immune response. While Dr. Grandjean has reported a reduction in vaccine antibodies, other researchers have not observed similar effects. In the largest study ^[1] of an exposed population, researchers reported no association between exposure to PFOA and response to an influenza vaccine in a group of 411 adults in West Virginia. Both [Health Canada](#) and the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) have also questioned whether small variations in antibody levels reported in some studies are sufficient to result in adverse health effects in humans. In fact, Dr. Grandjean's latest work on COVID patients does not suggest an association with blood levels of PFOA and PFOS and immune response.

And, while the Guardian asserts that not much is not being done to regulate PFAS, the US EPA and other authorities have implemented programs and policies that address PFAS with a comprehensive approach. Many concrete actions are already underway and [can be read about here](#). Our member companies are dedicated to the responsible production, use, and management of PFAS chemistries in a manner that protects the public health and our environment. We will continue to engage with lawmakers and regulators on this important issue and support strong, science based chemical regulations that are protective of the safety of human health and the environment.

^[1] Looker C et al. Influenza vaccine response in adults exposed to perfluorooctanoate and perfluorooctanesulfonate. *Toxicol Sci* 138: 76-88 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1093/toxsci/kft269>

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