



BOARD OF HEALTH

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Johnson County Board of Health Position Statement on Water Quality

Water is the most fundamental resource necessary for life. Water quality impacts every Iowan and every community in the state. High quality water serves as the foundation for our state's health, safety, and economy. Contaminated wells, unsafe rivers, and polluted groundwater increase healthcare costs, reduce the quality and value of our agricultural industry, and strain local governments already operating with tight budgets. Poor water quality results in substantially increased costs to our communities, including increased health care costs for treatment of diseases caused by poor water quality, increased costs on remediation of current water systems, and costs due to lost productivity.

In order to avoid these substantial future costs, a proactive and comprehensive approach to water quality must be taken, including: 1) expanding water quality monitoring systems beyond the current system which only measures nitrates, 2) improving support for private well users, and 3) adequately funding the State Hygienic Laboratory and local public health agencies to protect Iowa's water everywhere.

Perfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), or forever chemicals, are used in manufacturing of many water-resistant, heat-resistant, and stain-resistant products but if not disposed of properly, PFAS contaminate local water supplies. PFAS are called forever chemicals because their levels build up in wildlife and human tissue over time. PFAS exposure increases the risk of cancer, infertility, and endocrine and digestive diseases. On March 23, 2023, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources released a summary of PFAS testing in Iowa from October 2021 to December 2022. Out of 116 public water supplies tested, 52 contained at least one PFAS compound, with 15 exceeding the current "safe limit." Although most of Iowa's water systems' PFAS levels remain within current federal standards, the ability of PFAS to build up in our bodies over time means that we don't know what level of PFAS is safe enough. Thus, even at levels below current federal guidelines, the presence of PFAS in our water raises significant concerns about long-term health impacts.

The Johnson County Board of Health (JCBOH) supports measures to expand monitoring of the quality of Iowa's surface and groundwater. This includes measurements of artificial chemicals such as pesticides and PFAS chemicals, as well as naturally occurring contaminants such as arsenic, uranium, and manganese. These contaminants substantially decrease Iowa's water quality and put our entire community at risk of severe diseases

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such as cancer. Iowa is currently the state with the second-highest cancer rate in the nation and our rate continues to rise.

The JCBOH supports increasing funding to Iowa's Private Well Grants (PWG) program to increase support to well owners for expanded water testing and, where contamination is detected, mitigation measures, such as installing reverse osmosis systems.

The JCBOH supports increasing funding to the State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) and local public health agencies for enhanced water quality testing. These institutions currently lack the necessary equipment and supplies to measure water contaminants such as PFAS.

Throughout the Midwest, states are taking important actions to protect their water quality. For example, Michigan recently allocated \$25 million a year to its PFAS Action Response Team. Likewise, Wisconsin has been granted \$142.7 million in EPA funding to address PFAS and other water quality issues. On November 2, 2010, Iowans voted to amend the state constitution, establishing the Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. Up to 60% of the planned fund distributions was to be allocated to vehicles that would improve Iowa's water quality. The fund was to be financed by increasing sales tax by 3/8^{ths} of a cent. However, the sales tax increase has yet to be put into effect and thus the Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund remains empty.

Protecting Iowa's water is not optional; it's essential for the health, safety, and prosperity of every Iowan. The growing concerns of PFAS, nitrates, pesticides, and naturally occurring contaminants must be acknowledged. By funding the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, local public health agencies and the State Hygienic Laboratory can increase their analytical capacity to protect our public water systems. By increasing funding to Iowa's Private Well Grant, our private well owners are better supported to mitigate the effects of PFAS and other carcinogens found in their water. These comprehensive initiatives would bolster Iowa's economy while also making Iowa's water significantly safer to drink.

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