



# Health First

## Protecting Families from Toxic Chemicals in Food, Drinking Water, and Communities

Families in Massachusetts face growing health and cost pressures in almost every aspect of their daily lives.

At the same time, as families struggle with rising costs, many are also confronting a growing and unsettling reality: toxic chemicals and plastics are showing up in everyday essentials, from food packaging to drinking water.

### Public concern is broad and bipartisan

Families are tired of being told everything is fine while their kids get sicker, rates of chronic disease rise, and toxic exposures continue to increase.

Recent polling shows deep concern across the country about the health impacts of chemicals and plastics:

**92%** of Americans feel that protecting clean air and safe drinking water should be treated as a top public health priority.

**87%** of registered voters are concerned about the chemicals added to plastics.

**88%** of Americans are concerned about the health impacts of microplastics.

### Research increasingly links chemical exposures and rising rates of illness

Peer-reviewed studies increasingly connect the rise of toxic and untested chemicals to concerning disease trends over the past few decades, including:

- Nearly 80% increase in cancer in young people
- 84% increase in infertility
- Rates of dementia and Alzheimer's disease are expected to double by 2060

### Strong support for more government protections

Voters are frustrated that weak regulations allow chemical companies to sell and profit from hazardous chemicals that make people sick, while taxpayers are left to bear the health consequences and cleanup costs.

There is strong support from across the political spectrum for leaders who will:

- Put health first
- Reduce toxic exposures
- Hold polluters accountable

## THE PROBLEM:

# Health protections haven't kept pace



Everyone deserves to live in a world where our health comes first.

Yet today, despite evidence of serious health harms, some companies continue to make and use harmful chemicals and plastics, exploiting weak, unenforced, or outdated rules. These chemicals end up in neighborhoods, food, drinking water, air, consumer products, and workplaces.

## Plastics, PFAS, and toxic chemicals are hurting families and communities

Across the country, communities face preventable threats to their health from PFAS “forever chemicals,” plastics, and other toxic chemicals linked to cancer, infertility, and other serious diseases.

## The harm is not shared equally

Communities living near chemical or plastic manufacturing facilities or disposal sites often face higher exposures and disease burdens. Babies and children are especially vulnerable to toxic chemicals.

## Hidden costs that taxpayers can't afford

The health and cleanup costs associated with harmful chemicals and plastics total **trillions of dollars**, which is borne by taxpayers, families, and local governments, not by chemical companies who caused the problem.

### DATA SNAPSHOT

45% of Americans have toxic PFAS “forever chemicals” in their drinking water.



More than 5,000 tons of toxic chemicals are released from products into homes and workplaces annually.



Hundreds of plastic chemicals were recently found in pregnant women and 96 toxic chemicals were recently found in toddlers.



The number one cause of death for firefighters is cancer.



## THE SOLUTION:

# Health-first policies that work



The good news is that effective solutions already exist and are moving forward in many states and cities across the country, with bipartisan support from firefighters, nurses, families, and farmers.

The best solutions for protecting our health include:

### TRANSPARENCY:

#### People have a right to know what they are exposed to.

People deserve clear information about the chemicals used in products and manufacturing, as well as those showing up in drinking water and food, and their potential hazards. Transparency empowers consumers, protects workers, and supports sound public health policy.

### BAN THE BAD:

#### Phase out the most toxic chemicals and plastics.

Some chemicals and plastics are simply too dangerous to keep using. Highly toxic chemicals and plastics should be phased out of products, packaging, manufacturing, and buildings, starting with well-documented threats such as PFAS “forever chemicals,” certain plastic additives (phthalates, bisphenols), PVC (vinyl), and toxic flame retardants.

### SAFER SOLUTIONS:

#### Designing a safer, healthier future for everyone.

Governments, businesses, and institutions should invest in safer alternatives to toxic chemicals and products—for example, safer PFAS-free firefighting foams are now available and effective thanks to state actions that have driven their development.

### ACCOUNTABILITY AND FAIRNESS:

#### Polluters pay.

It is not fair for communities to bear the costs of toxic pollution. Polluters should be held financially responsible for the harm caused to people and the environment. Governments must also act swiftly to support impacted communities and enforce strong health protections.

For references information, please visit this resource on our website:



# Challenges Facing MASSACHUSETTS

- PFAS have been detected in almost all public water systems in Massachusetts, with levels above safe limits found in 76 public water systems in 99 cities and towns. PFAS contamination has also been found in private wells.
- People living near airports, military facilities, and certain industries have had especially high levels of PFAS in their drinking water.
- Massachusetts firefighters have also faced elevated exposure due to PFAS used in firefighting foam and in their personal protective equipment.

## The good news is that Massachusetts is addressing these challenges

- The state established Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) that limit the amount of six PFAS chemicals allowed in drinking water.
- From 2018-2025, Massachusetts spent over \$1.7 billion in federal, state, and local funds to test and treat PFAS contamination in drinking water.
- The state banned PFAS in firefighters' personal protective equipment, with the ban taking effect on January 1, 2027.

### VOICES FROM MASSACHUSETTS

MA has been a leader in setting protective standards for drinking water. The next step will be to tackle the problem at its source, by addressing PFAS in products and in waste, following the lead of other states in New England and around the country.



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### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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