NZDA Position Statement
Water Fluoridation

REVISED MARCH 2020

The NZDA continues to strongly support and promote community water fluoridation as a safe and effective preventive measure to improve public oral health.

It is the NZDA's position that all New Zealanders should have access to optimally fluoridated water, wherever this is practical.

1. Fluoride is a naturally occurring element. It is found in the air, soil, water, seawater, plants and many foods. In NZ, fluoride occurs naturally in all water supplies, but at a level that is too low to protect against tooth decay. Adjusting the water fluoride level to 0.7-1.0 parts per million helps protect against tooth decay.

2. Fluoride promotes the repair of early decay through remineralisation and reduces the solubility of tooth enamel in acid to prevent decay. It works best at doing this when it is available at low concentration and relatively frequently, which can be achieved through water fluoridation.

3. Water fluoridation is a cost-effective way for communities to receive fluoride. NZ has reported net cost savings for even relatively small communities.

4. Selected water supplies have been fluoridated in the USA since 1945, and New Zealand since 1954 (currently at around 50% population coverage). Currently over a third of a billion people in 24 countries receive fluoridated water. The safety of water fluoridation has been intensively researched for over 65 years and continues to be subject to review in New Zealand and overseas. Reviews of research from Australia, Europe, the UK and the USA have consistently found benefits to dental health and no evidence of adverse general health effects from water fluoridation at optimal levels.

5. Fluoride can cause dental fluorosis which is normally seen as small white flecks, faint white lines or white patches on the tooth surface. A series of New Zealand studies have found that while water fluoridation in New Zealand is associated with an increase in white flecking, opacities or fine white lines in children, it is not associated with increased levels of fluorosis of aesthetic concern. The 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey reported no significant differences in the levels of dental fluorosis of people living in fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas, and importantly no cases at all of severe fluorosis in the people examined. To reduce the potential for dental fluorosis it is recommended that toothpaste be issued as a smear on the child's brush and that children don't eat toothpaste.

6. When considering the white flecking, opacities or fine white lines that can occur in association with water fluoridation, it is also necessary to consider the much more significant effects of pain and poor appearance caused by dental decay.

7. Water fluoridation benefits people of all ages with natural teeth. Among children and adults decay rates are approximately 20-30% lower in communities with water fluoridation.