



# Water Fluoridation

---

## New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine Policy Statement

### Policy statement

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) endorses community water fluoridation as an important public health measure in the maintenance of oral health, the prevention of tooth decay and the reduction of health inequalities.

### Background

Community water fluoridation helps prevent tooth decay and reduces inequalities in oral health. Tooth decay is a common condition in New Zealand causing pain, infection, loss of teeth and loss of self-esteem. Oral pain can stop a person from eating, working, and sleeping. Tooth decay poses extra risks for people with specific health problems – for example, heart murmurs, recent cardiac surgery, renal disease, bleeding disorders, and low immunity.

The benefits of community water fluoridation are most pronounced for those at risk of poor oral health. In New Zealand, Māori and Pacific people and people living in more deprived areas experience poorer oral health outcomes compared to other New Zealanders<sup>2</sup>.

The mineral fluoride occurs naturally in water supplies in New Zealand but mostly at levels too low to provide protection against tooth decay. Community water fluoridation allows for the adjustment of fluoride levels in a public water supply to a level where protection against tooth decay can occur. The New Zealand Ministry of Health recommends that the level of fluoride in water be adjusted to between 0.7 and 1.0 parts per million (ppm)<sup>1</sup>. Community water fluoridation programmes have been running in countries with low natural amounts of fluoride in drinking water supplies for over fifty years. There is consistent evidence of the effectiveness and safety<sup>3</sup> of these programmes in assisting in the maintenance of oral health of these communities, regardless of social, economic or cultural group, when present in drinking-water at this level.

In conjunction with toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste (as brushing helps to remove the bacteria found in plaque and keeps gums healthy), community water fluoridation ensures additional benefits for community oral health above that of fluoridation or brushing on its own<sup>4</sup>. A healthy, low sugar diet and regular dental check ups also contribute to good oral health.

Community water fluoridation is supported by a number of national and international organisations including:

- The New Zealand Ministry of Health<sup>1</sup>
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians<sup>5</sup>
- The New Zealand Dental Association<sup>6</sup>
- New Zealand Royal Society<sup>7</sup>
- Public Health Association Australia<sup>8</sup>
- World Health Organization<sup>9</sup>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services<sup>10</sup>

- FDI World Dental Federation<sup>11</sup>
- American Dental Association<sup>12</sup>

Community water fluoridation is a population-wide approach affecting the whole population served by a particular water supply. There is an ethical argument to support community water fluoridation as the most effective approach to prevent tooth decay and reduce oral health inequalities. Population-wide approaches raise other ethical issues such as consent, as it is difficult (but possible) to 'opt-off' for those who do not wish to receive fluoridated water<sup>13</sup>. The NZCPHM considers that the benefits of community water fluoridation outweigh these concerns.

### Links with other NZCPHM policies

Health Equity

Māori Health (forthcoming)

First 1000 days of life (forthcoming)

### References and further information

1. Ministry of Health (2012). *Fluoridation*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/fluoridation>.
2. Ministry of Health (2010) *Our Oral Health: Key findings of the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
3. National Fluoridation Information Service (2011). *Review of scientific reviews relating to water fluoridation published between January 2000 and July 2010*. Wellington: National Fluoridation Information Service Advisory
4. Beaglehole R., Benzian H., Crail J., et al. (2009). *The Oral Health Atlas: Mapping a Neglected Global Health Issue*. Brighton: FDI World Dental Federation
5. Royal Australasian College of Physicians (2013). *Water fluoridation: The most effective preventive oral health measure for New Zealand children*. Retrieved May 2013 from: <http://www.racp.edu.au/download.cfm?DownloadFile=13B83E98-A334-3699-C0D60C6447F1DA66>
6. The New Zealand Dental Association (2012). *New Zealand Dental Association Inc. Statement on Water Fluoridation*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.healthysmiles.org.nz/assets/NZDAFluoridationStatement2012-finalrevision.pdf>
7. New Zealand Royal Society (2012) *Statement by Professor Sir David Skegg, President of the Royal Society of New Zealand*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.rph.org.nz/content/2dcd18e7-db16-4023-962e-c8ac2049640c.cmr>
8. Public Health Association Australia (2012). *Oral Health Policy*. Retrieved March 2013 from: [http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/130201\\_Oral%20Health%20Policy%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/130201_Oral%20Health%20Policy%20FINAL.pdf)
9. Petersen P.E. and Lennon M.A. (2004.) *WHO Effective use of fluorides for the prevention of dental caries in the 21st century; the WHO approach*. *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol* 32: p. 319-21
10. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012). *Community Water Fluoridation: Questions and Answers*. Retrieved March 2013 from: [http://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/fact\\_sheets/cwf\\_qa.htm#5](http://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/fact_sheets/cwf_qa.htm#5)
11. FDI World Dental Federation (2008). *Promoting Dental Health through Water Fluoridation*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.fdiworldental.org/media/11327/Promoting-dental-health-through-water-fluoridation-2008.pdf>

12. American Dental Association (2002). *American Dental Association Supports Fluoridation*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.ada.org/2092.aspx>
13. Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007). *Public Health Ethical Issues. Chapter 7 – Fluoridation of water*. Retrieved March 2013 from: <http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/public-health/public-health-water-fluoridation>

**Adopted by Council:** June 2013

**Year for review:** 2018