

Fluoride Referendum

A referendum on whether fluoride should be added to public water supplies in the Waitaki District is being held as part of the local body elections in October. Information outlining the proposal will be included with the voting documents, which will be posted to electors during 21 – 26 September, or can be found on council's website.

Waitaki District Council does not express a view on fluoridation and has invited the parties representing the opposing views to supply an article of up to one page each to provide information for and against fluoridation. The articles are included here. It is emphasised that these views represent the opinions of the parties campaigning for and against the issue and should not be taken as reflecting Council's position.

The case **FOR** adding fluoride to public water supplies

Waitaki residents have the chance to learn all about fluoride in drinking water with the launch of a campaign called Vote Fluoride.

When people living in the Waitaki district receive their ballot papers for the October 13 local body elections, they will be asked to vote yes or no to having the fluoride levels that occur naturally in water topped up.

This practice is recommended by the World Health Organisation, New Zealand Dental and Medical Associations, Plunket and New Zealand's Ministry of Health as a safe and effective means of reducing tooth decay.

The aim of the Vote Fluoride campaign is to encourage people to educate themselves about fluoride in the lead up to the referendum. The campaign includes the website www.votefluoride.org.nz and a 24-7 0800 FLUORIDE (0800 358 674) number so people with questions about fluoride can find out about the latest research, receive further information and have any queries answered.

Chief Executive of the Otago District Health Board, Brian Rousseau, says compared with national statistics, some communities within Otago have very poor oral health. While there is debate about adding fluoride to water supplies, the vast majority of research shows that topping up fluoride in a water supply reduces dental decay.

"In Otago the amount of fluoride occurring naturally in water is between 0.1 and 0.3 parts per million. We are recommending this level is topped up to between 0.7 and 1.0 parts per million – the optimal fluoride level for protection against tooth decay," says Mr Rousseau.

Currently, about 60% of New Zealand's population with reticulated water supplies [supplied by a network of pipes] drink water where the fluoride is topped up to levels to ensure it assists in reducing tooth decay.

"We respect the right of people to make their own choice about fluoride, however we encourage them to make a well-informed and considered decision when it comes to ticking the box in the referendum," says Mr Rousseau.

Key points

- Fluoride in drinking water is a safe and effective way of reducing tooth decay in Otago.
- Fluoride occurs naturally in water – the district health board is recommending that it is topped up to a level that offers the best protection against tooth decay. They also recommend a healthy diet and the use of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Fluoride naturally found in New Zealand's water supplies is not at a high enough level to be effective to prevent tooth decay. In order to gain oral health benefits we recommend that a safe level of fluoride is added.
- The most deprived members of our communities will benefit the most from fluoride.
- Fluoride in water does not cause cancer, bone fractures or poisoning.
- In 1999 the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognised adding fluoride to water as one of the ten great public health achievements in the United States during the 20th century.
- It's important for Otago residents to keep in mind that fluoride is used in many forms around the world to prevent tooth decay, whether in fluoridated salt, milk or in water supplies. Currently drinking water in Greater Dunedin and parts of Mosgiel is fluoridated.

Information provided by Otago District Health Board.