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THE OFFICIAL LEGACY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER





### Community Water Fluoridation

*by Juliet Guichan, President, Calgarians for Kids Health*

There is fluoride in all fresh water. At all ages, fluoride helps protect your teeth from decay.

Fluoridation is a public health program that safely tops up existing levels of fluoride to prevent tooth decay. The safe water fluoride level is set by the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality. In Calgary, fluoride occurs at the level of 0.4 parts per million, which is just below the optimal level of 0.7 parts per million.

The decision to adjust the fluoride level in public water supplies is made by our City Council. Calgarians voted yes to fluoridation in plebiscites held in 1989 and 1998. In 2011, City Council decided to stop water fluoridation.

Since fluoridation ended, dental professionals are seeing much more dental decay, both generally, and especially in children.

A recent study of Grade 2 students in Edmonton (fluoridated), and Calgary (non-fluoridated), confirmed that Calgary children had a dramatic rise in decay rates following the cessation of community water fluoridation compared to their fluoridated Edmonton peers. These findings confirm the adverse impact of fluoride cessation on children's dental health in Calgary and supports the need for community water fluoridation.

Dental disease in children leads to poor overall health, impacting their ability to eat, sleep, play, and attend school. Tooth loss can lead to speech impediments, self-consciousness about appearance, and low self-esteem. Millions of school and work hours are lost each year in Canada because of dental-related illness.

Fluoridation is a normal practice around the world, including Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Red Deer, Ottawa, Hamilton, and Halifax. Fluoridation is like supplementation of other important nutrients, such as iodine in salt, vitamin C in orange juice, and vitamin A and D3 in milk. Some European countries that do not have fluoridation supplement milk or salt with fluoride.

Community water fluoridation is the most effective and reliable source for fluoride consumption.

The Canadian Agency for Drug and Technologies in Health concluded "there is consistent evidence that community water fluoridation protects against dental caries in children and adults and leads to improved oral health outcomes with very uncommon and minor side effects". <https://www.cadth.ca/community-water-fluoridation-programs-health-technology-assessment>. The uncommon side effect is a slight change in colour of the teeth known as "fluorosis" which is usually mild and only detectable by a dental professional.

By helping prevent cavities, water fluoridation reduces the need for dental treatment, saving families and the healthcare system money. The cost to add optimal fluoride into Calgary's water is \$1.29 per citizen, per year, and that would save an average of approximately \$55 per person in avoided dental and medical visit costs. Adjusting fluoride in public drinking water is a simple, low-cost way to prevent tooth decay for all Calgarians, regardless of their age or income.

Please visit the Alberta Health Services website for more detailed information on the benefits of community water fluoridation at <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/ten-fluopride-facts.aspx>.