

August 22, 2014, Media release from the Royal Society of New Zealand,
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Review finds community water fluoridation safe and effective

A review of the scientific evidence for and against the efficacy and safety of fluoridation of public water supplies has found that the levels of fluoridation used in New Zealand create no health risks and provide protection against tooth decay. Councils currently implementing this measure can be confident about its public health benefits, while those not currently fluoridating water can consider it a safe and effective option.

The review, entitled *Health Effects of Water Fluoridation: a Review of the Scientific Evidence*, was commissioned by Sir Peter Gluckman, the New Zealand Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor and Sir David Skegg, President of the Royal Society of New Zealand at the request of Auckland City on behalf of several local Councils.

"The process for the review was rigorous," said Sir David Skegg. "It included an extensive evaluation of the scientific literature by a panel of five experts, as well as one lay observer with local body experience. The resulting report was reviewed by three international experts and by the Director of the National Poisons Centre," he said.

According to Skegg, the panel paid particularly close attention to the claims that fluoride contributes to the risks of cancer, musculoskeletal and hormonal disorders, as well as to claims that it has adverse effects on brain development – these being the major contentions about potential harms that have been made.

"The panel concluded that the concerns raised by those opposed to fluoridation are not supported by the scientific evidence," said Skegg.

According to the report, the only side effect of fluoridation at the levels used in New Zealand is mild dental fluorosis, which can cause opaque white areas in the tooth enamel that is usually of no cosmetic significance. This is found to be as common in non-fluoridated areas as it is in fluoridated areas, which is probably a reflection of behaviour such as swallowing of fluoridated toothpaste by young children.

"The review finds compelling evidence that fluoridation of the water at the established and recommended levels produces broad and continuing benefits for the dental health of New Zealanders," said Sir Peter Gluckman. "The public can be reassured on the basis of robust scientific data, that the implementation of this public health measure poses no risk of adverse health effects," he said.

"It is worth noting that dental health remains a major issue for much of the New Zealand population, particularly in communities of low socioeconomic status."

From a scientific perspective, the report finds that community water fluoridation provides a cost-effective and equitable way of improving public health. However, it should be noted that the review does not address the broader philosophical issues that have surrounded fluoridation.

Visit [Health Effects of Water Fluoridation](#) for full report, executive summary and a list of contributors.