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From: **BBC Complaints** <bbc_complaints_website@contact.bbc.co.uk>

Date: Thu, Jul 3, 2025 at 12:39 PM

Subject: BBC Complaints - Case Number - CAS-8081909-W0Q0M1

To: Paul Connett <pconnett@gmail.com>

Reference CAS-8081909-W0Q0M1

Dear Professors Connett and Howard

Thanks again for your email to the Director-General who explained that this has been passed back into the BBC's complaints process. We're sorry you weren't happy with the first response but want to reassure you that your comments have been discussed with the appropriate senior editors.

Looking at your points in turn we have reviewed the episode of 'What in the World' which is aimed at a general youth audience across the globe. Indeed, explaining complex issues in an accessible way is the whole point of the podcast. We appreciate your detailed explanation but believe this item achieved 'due' accuracy which the BBC's Editorial Guidelines explain as meaning *"that the accuracy must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation..."* The reporter said 'the levels of fluoride in these studies was a lot higher than what is found in US drinking water' and as your original letter points out US drinking water has 0.7 ppm and the potentially dangerous level is 1.5 ppm. Notwithstanding your arguments, it seems a duly accurate and fair interpretation for this audience.

In this podcast we also reflected the majority view – from the World Health Organisation, US Centre for Disease Control, the American Dental Society and others – that adding fluoride to water is safe and reduces dental decay. But we also clearly explained that the practice is controversial because others take a different view – we explained in detail what some of their concerns are. The BBC's health reporter Michelle Roberts was also very clear that fluoride can be harmful in some situations.

When it comes to the other studies we will continue to report developments around water fluoridation but the fact that items 2-4 may not have been covered by the BBC does not, in itself suggest a breach of standards. In general terms, decisions about what matters to cover are legitimate expressions of the editorial judgement of journalists and editors. This is a journalistic freedom which is recognised by Ofcom, the BBC's regulator. There was certainly no 'censorship' of a BBC reporter but it is fair to say there is a higher bar for publishing stories around health risk which is again outlined in the Editorial Guidelines:

"The reporting of risk can have an impact on the public's perception of that risk, particularly with health or crime stories. We should avoid worrying our audiences unduly and contextualise our reports to be clear about the likelihood of the risk occurring. This is particularly true in reporting health stories that may cause individuals to alter their behaviour in ways that could be harmful."

However, your input has been invaluable and the BBC will continue to look at how to cover the debate over water fluoridation as illustrated here -

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20250528-why-some-countries-dont-fluoridate-their-water>

We trust this response provides some reassurance and an explanation as to why we covered the story in the way we did, in line with our commitment to accuracy and impartiality.

This concludes Stage 1 of our complaints process. That means we can't correspond with you further here. If you remain unhappy, you can now contact the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU). The ECU is Stage 2 of the BBC's complaints process. You'll need to explain why you think there's a potential breach of standards, or if the issue is significant and should still be investigated. Please do so within 20 working days of this reply.

Full details of how we handle complaints are available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/handle-complaint/>.

In the meantime, we'd like to thank you again for getting in touch. All feedback, positive and negative, is valued and shared with senior editors to make sure they are aware of audience concerns.

Kind regards
Kevin Silverton
BBC Complaints team

How to contact the ECU:

We've provided a unique link for you in this email. This will open up further information about how to submit your complaint. You'll be asked for the case reference number we've provided in this reply. Once you've used the link and submitted your complaint, the link will no longer work.

This is your link to contact the ECU if you wish:

[Click Here](#)

NB You cannot reply to this email address. This is sent from an outgoing account only which is not monitored.



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