

# Water fluoridation

## Water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to help prevent tooth decay in the community.

### Why do water utilities add fluoride to drinking water?

Water utilities add fluoride to drinking water to reduce tooth decay in children and adults. Good dental health is extremely important for people's overall health and wellbeing. Adding fluoride to drinking water keeps teeth healthy and reduces costs for everyone in our community. This is especially important for people who might not have regular access to dental services.

Most people get fluoride every day when they brush their teeth or drink tap water. Fluoride is a natural mineral found in soil, rocks, and water, but the water in the rivers and dams that provide our drinking water usually does not have enough fluoride to prevent tooth decay.

### Why is protecting against tooth decay important?

Tooth decay is one of the most common health problems in Australia and can have a serious impact on people's overall health and wellbeing. It requires a visit to a dental practitioner to prevent tooth decay, repair or remove teeth. The most serious problems can require treatment at hospital. Healthy teeth and gums are important for your quality of life, helping you smile, speak, eat, socialise and feel good about yourself.

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**Fluoride helps to repair teeth with early signs of tooth decay before cavities form. It also helps children's teeth be more resistant to tooth decay as they are forming – protecting them right from the start.**

### How does drinking fluoridated water help prevent tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth. These bacteria produce acid after eating sugary foods. The acid strips away minerals from the tooth's enamel surface, weakening teeth and increasing the chance of getting tooth decay.

Fluoride helps strengthen the tooth's enamel surface to prevent tooth decay. Fluoride can also help repair tooth enamel before serious decay occurs. Water fluoridation provides baby and adult teeth with frequent and consistent contact with low levels of fluoride.

Recent studies from NSW and Australia show that fluoridation reduces tooth decay across the whole community. Children living in towns with water fluoridation have significantly less tooth decay than those without. There are also more children with no tooth decay at all in communities with fluoride in their drinking water.

### Is drinking fluoridated water safe?

Fluoridated drinking water is safe for children and adults of all ages. In 2017, Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) reviewed all the scientific research into fluoridated drinking water. It found that drinking fluoridated water does not cause any health problems and has the benefit of preventing tooth decay.

Some people claim that it is not safe to drink fluoridated water. They say it can cause cancer or reduce children's intelligence. Reliable scientific evidence does not support these claims.

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## What if I get too much fluoride?

Having too much fluoride can cause white lines to appear on people's teeth, known as dental fluorosis. Noticeable fluorosis is very uncommon in Australia.

Water utilities and NSW Health check the levels of fluoride in our water regularly to make sure it has enough to prevent tooth decay and avoid fluorosis.

## How long have people been drinking fluoridated water?

Fluoride has been added to drinking water for over 75 years. The first fluoridated water supply was in the USA in 1945. Tasmania was the first Australian state to begin fluoridation in 1953, followed by parts of NSW in 1956.

Today almost all public drinking water supplies in NSW are fluoridated.

## Who supports water fluoridation?

Water fluoridation is supported by many reputable health and dental associations across Australia and the world. The following organisations support and encourage water fluoridation as a public health measure to help prevent tooth decay:

- National Health and Medical Research Council
- World Health Organization
- Australian Dental Association
- Australian Medical Association
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians

## What else can I do to protect my teeth?

- Brush your teeth, gums and tongue with fluoride toothpaste every morning and night
- Have regular meals and less snacks during the day
- Choose water as your main drink
- Have dental check-ups and see a dental practitioner if you have any sore teeth or bleeding gums



Brush your teeth morning and night



Eat more fruit and vegies



Choose water as a drink



Have regular dental check-ups



## More information

NHMRC website

[www.nhmrc.gov.au/fluoridation](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/fluoridation)

NSW Health website

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/water/Pages/fluoridation.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/water/Pages/fluoridation.aspx)