



Voting yay or decay?

Fluoride referendum for Southland District

BY HAMISH MCNEILLY

THE future of Southlanders' smiles may depend on a referendum to add fluoride to the water throughout Southland District.

Southland District Health Board has joined forces with the Otago District Health Board to combat the poor oral health in the community with the referendum to coincide with the local body elections.

At present only Invercargill and Bluff have fluoride in their water and the Waitaki District, Central Otago District, Clutha District and Southland District were all including the fluoride referendum at this year's local body elections.

The Gore District Council has decided not to take part in the Vote Fluoride campaign, but may re-visit it in the near future.

SDHB clinical director of oral health services Dr Tim Mackay said fluoride was essential for healthy teeth and while it doesn't stop decay in a patient, "it significantly reduces how much they have got".

"We are getting older people who still have all their teeth, thanks to fluoride."

Dr Mackay said in communities without fluoride in the water, combined with poor diet and socio-economic living conditions, children as young as two were facing extraction of painful baby teeth.

He said there was a marked difference in the oral hygiene in Southland between those who had fluoride added in their water and those who did not, with fluoride added to Invercargill water since 1967. He said as well as the health benefits of fluoride being added to the water it also played a major economic impact on the community, as dental pain often prevented a person from carrying out their daily duties.

He said fluoride not only helps repair the early stages of tooth decay, it makes teeth more resistant to decay by strengthening the tooth surface and it interferes with the growth of the bacteria which cause cavities.

With the level of fluoride added to water at only .8 parts per million (ppm), Dr Mackay said it was far less

than the amount in toothpaste and offered the best protection against tooth decay. Fluoridated water has proven to be more effective than tablets, which has to be administered every day to be effective.

SDHB oral health services manager Lynley Irvine said people with poor teeth often suffered from low self-esteem, yet tooth decay was entirely preventable.

"There is no doubt it can be linked to their future."

With people often confusing fluoride with chlorine, Mrs Irvine said fluoride had no smell, nor taste and would cost approximately 40c per person each year, with the Government prepared to subsidise communities who wanted fluoride.

Representatives from the SDHB will soon be visiting communities to discuss the referendum and in particular promote their Vote Fluoride campaign. The referendum is non-binding and if the community votes for it, consultation will still be undertaken within each particular community.

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Smile: Southland District Health Board clinical director of oral health services Dr Tim Mackay shows what a healthy pair of teeth should look like.



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ON June 27 at a full meeting of Southland District Council, Councillors voted to support a referendum to survey the views of local residents' for fluoridation of their water supply.

Southland District Council Mayor Frana Cardno said "It will be up to the individual community boards concerned to make up their own mind how they proceed after the referendum results come through".

Previously council considered

introducing fluoride in 12 district water supplies as part of 2004 long term plan, but decided not to proceed after receiving 168 submissions, with 10 supporting fluoridation and 158 opposed to it.

People living in the Southland District Council area will be asked about adding fluoride to their drinking water when they receive their ballot paper prior to the October 13 local body elections.