



# Health Talk

HEALTH NEWS OF THE REGION

## Launch of Vote Fluoride campaign

The oral health of Southland residents will be under the spotlight in the next few weeks.

Southland and Otago District Health Boards are joining together to publicly raise awareness of poor oral health in the two regions and to promote the benefits of fluoride for improving oral health.

The campaign kicked off last week with the launch of a dedicated website:

[www.votefluoride.org.nz](http://www.votefluoride.org.nz) and an 0800 number (0800 358 674). People can email questions about oral health and fluoride to the website and can call the 0800 number (24/7) for an information pack.

Dental Public Health Specialist for the SDHB, Dr Tim Mackay, says with parts of Southland experiencing very poor oral health it's timely the campaign is focusing people's attention on the issue. It is not uncommon, says Dr Mackay, for staff to treat preschoolers facing extractions of baby teeth under anaesthesia and primary school students needing multiple fillings. Decay also affects adults with some individuals in the community living with chronic dental pain, which at times, prevents them from working. Currently only Invercargill city and Bluff have fluoride in their drinking water.

Oral Health Manager for the SDHB, Lynley Irvine, says dental data for Southland confirms that children in areas with fluoride have less

tooth decay than children who don't have fluoride in their drinking water.

The issue of whether to introduce fluoride to drinking water will be debated by Southland District Council via a referenda in this year's local body elections. Residents in Tuatapere, Te Anau, Otautau, Ohai/Nightcaps, Riverton and Winton will be given the chance to say yes or no to adding fluoride to their water supply by postal vote. If the majority of residents vote yes to adding fluoride to their water, then the councils would most likely make a recommendation to add it to their community plan. The plan would be subject to public submissions – giving people another opportunity to have their say.

Although decay rates have fallen internationally over the last 20 years, mainly due to fluoridated toothpaste, contemporary studies continue to show that the difference in tooth decay between fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas remains significant. Recent evidence also suggests dental decay rates are starting to increase again amongst New Zealand children.

The public education campaign will focus on ensuring people are well informed when they make their decision to vote yes or no at the October elections.

### What is fluoride and how does it help your teeth?

Fluoride is one of the most common elements on Earth. Worldwide, it is found geologically in water and soils at up to 20 parts per million (ppm). In Southland the amount of fluoride which occurs naturally in water is between 0.1 and 0.3 ppm. We recommend that this level is topped up to between 0.7ppm and 1.0ppm – the optimal fluoride level for protection against tooth decay.

Tooth decay is the most prevalent disease in our society, causing pain and loss of self-esteem and resulting in a cycle of tooth repair and sometimes tooth loss. Yet tooth decay can be prevented cheaply and effectively.

The greatest success in decay prevention is achieved where fluoride in water occurs as part of a wider oral health strategy. A healthy diet, good oral hygiene, regular tooth brushing and the consumption of water for refreshment

are complementary initiatives to fluoride, each of which enhances the benefits of the others. None should be considered in isolation.

However only topping up levels of fluoride in water offers protection without the need for behavioural changes, which are often difficult to achieve and sustain. Water fluoridation is the safest and most effective public health strategy available to reduce tooth decay, according to the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health. Topping up the fluoride levels is also supported by the New Zealand Dental Association, New Zealand Medical Association and Plunket.

### Studies show fluoride improves oral health by:

- Helping to repair tooth decay in the early stages.
- Strengthening the tooth surface and making teeth more resistant to decay.
- Interfering with the bacteria which cause cavities.

Fluoride has been added to New Zealand's drinking water for the past 50 years with no reported adverse health effects linked to fluoride in any of the fluoridated areas.



Dr Tim Mackay, SDHB Dental Public Health Specialist and SDHB Oral Health Manager, Lynley Irvine.

### Does fluoride in water cause adverse health effects?

The weight of scientific evidence supporting the safety and effectiveness of fluoride in drinking water is overwhelming.

Many cities and towns have now had topped up fluoride in their drinking water for many decades and there is no conclusive evidence linking fluoride with any adverse health effects.

### Did you know?

- About 60% of New Zealand's population on reticulated water (supplied by a network of pipes) or over 2 million people currently drink water where the fluoride is topped up to ensure it helps to reduce tooth decay.
- The most deprived members of our communities will benefit the most from fluoride.
- Fluoride in water does not cause cancer, bone fractures or poisoning.
- In 1999 the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention recognised water fluoridation as one of the ten great public health achievements in the United States during the 20th century.



Please take the time to consider this issue and your views on oral health and fluoride.  
Check out [www.votefluoride.org.nz](http://www.votefluoride.org.nz) or call 0800 FLUORIDE (0800 358 674) to learn more.  
Voting papers for the fluoride referendum will be sent out in September and must be returned by post by 13 October.