



# Boards take the bit between their teeth

By **AMY MILNE**

**THE** Southland and Otago District Health Boards have launched a Vote Fluoride campaign in the leadup to referendums on fluoridation.

Residents in Southland, Clutha, Central Otago and Waitaki districts will be asked to vote yes or no to having the fluoride levels that occur naturally in water topped up, when they receive their ballot papers for the local body elections on October 13.

Southland District Health Board oral health services clinical director Tim Mackay said in the past councils had made the decision about fluoridation on the behalf of their communities.

Having referendums allowed a wider response to what was often a contentious issue.

"It's letting the community make a choice about their health," Dr Mackay said.

Fluoride has been added to New Zealand drinking water for the past 50 years with no reported adverse health effects in any of the fluoridated areas, despite many critics' claims it could cause bone cancers, he said.

Invercargill has had fluoride added to its water since 1967.

"When you look at the national cancer registry, you don't find people living in Invercargill have got more bone cancer than people who live in Christchurch or whatever. There's pretty good evidence that it's safe and effective."

Thursday, 23 August 2007, p. 7



**Rotten:** A child undergoing surgery to have decayed teeth removed.

Some Southland children as young as 2 were facing painful extractions of baby teeth under anaesthesia and primary school pupils were requiring multiple fillings, he said.

Fluoride helped repair the early stages of tooth decay and also made teeth more resistant to decay.

There were marked differences in the oral health of Southland people who had fluoridated water to those who did not.

He said adding fluoride also had economic benefits.

"We are currently visiting communities to discuss the Vote Fluoride referenda, which are non-binding, and if a community votes for fluoride, consultation will still be

undertaken by local bodies within each particular community," Dr MacKay said.

Otago District Health Board chief executive officer Brian Rousseau said some Southland and Otago communities had very poor oral health compared with national statistics.

"In Otago and Southland, the amount of fluoride occurring naturally in water is between 0.1 and 0.3 parts per million. We are recommending this level is topped up to between 0.7 and 1.0 parts per million — the optimal fluoride level for protection against tooth decay," Mr Rousseau said.

The campaign includes the website [www.votefluoride.org.nz](http://www.votefluoride.org.nz) and information line 0800 358 674.