

## WHAT IS TOOTH DECAY?

Tooth decay is a common disease which eats away at our teeth causing pain and sometimes days away from work and school. We can't treat decay with medication. Once decay gets into our teeth, the infected part has to be cut out and a filling put in by a Dental Therapist or Dentist. This can be expensive.

## WHAT IS FLUORIDE?

Fluoride is a natural element found in air, soil, fresh water, sea water, plants and lots of foods. We mostly get fluoride from water, food and toothpaste.



## HOW DOES FLUORIDE HELP OUR TEETH?

Fluoride works in three ways to help protect our teeth from decay:

- Fluoride helps to make our teeth stronger.
  - Fluoride helps fight the germs that cause tooth decay.
  - Fluoride helps fix the very early stages of tooth decay.
- Once teeth have come through the gums, fluoride in food, drinks and saliva continually washes over the teeth to help protect them. Fluoride also helps to strengthen children's developing teeth by adding fluoride into the structure of their teeth as they grow.

## WHAT IS WATER FLUORIDATION?

In New Zealand fluoride is found naturally in all water supplies, but mostly at a level too low to protect against decay. Water fluoridation is the adjustment of fluoride levels in water supplies to provide extra protection for teeth against decay. Around the world millions of people use water with natural or adjusted levels of fluoride.

## WILL WATER FLUORIDATION HELP REDUCE DECAY FOR ME AND MY FAMILY?

Research shows that people who live in areas with fluoridated water have better teeth overall than people who live in non-fluoridated areas. In communities that have fluoridated water, fewer people have decay, and those who have some decay, have less than people with non-fluoridated water.

*The people who benefit most from fluoridation are the most disadvantaged in the community and may not have toothpaste and brushes or be able to afford dental care.*

## IS FLUORIDATION SAFE?

Research concludes that water fluoridation is safe and effective. There is no proven evidence that fluoride, at recommended levels in water supplies, causes any negative health affects. In excessive quantities, fluoride can cause white flecking on teeth. Millions of people all over the world safely drink fluoridated water every day.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Fluoride is found naturally in water.
- In some parts of the world fluoride can be found naturally at levels significantly higher than the level we adjust it to in New Zealand.
- Water fluoridation can reduce decay in children by up to 60%.
- Water fluoridation can reduce decay in adults, throughout their life, by up to 35%.
- It is cost effective to fluoridate water. For example:
  - It costs about 50c per person per year to fluoridate Wellington's water supply.
  - The cost of just one tube of fluoride toothpaste is over \$3.
  - These costs are a fraction of the cost of a filling at a private dentist.
- The dental health benefits of fluoride have been known and tested since the 1930s.
- Christchurch 4 year-olds (who do not have fluoridated water) have on average 95% more decay in their baby teeth than Wellington 4 year-olds (who do have fluoridated water).
- Christchurch 9 year-olds (who do not have fluoridated water) have on average 80% more decay in their permanent teeth than Wellington 9 year-olds (who do have fluoridated water).
- The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA included water fluoridation in the list of the Ten Great Public Health Achievements 1900-1999.
- About 40 countries around the world have fluoride in their water at levels best for healthy teeth including New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, USA, Canada, South Africa and Israel.

## DENTAL HEALTH AND FLUORIDE

If you would like more information about water fluoridation, please phone, write or email:



This resource is available from [www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz)  
or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB.

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## DENTAL HEALTH AND FLUORIDE

**TOOTH DECAY IS  
COMMON, COSTLY  
AND PAINFUL.**



**FLUORIDE CAN  
HELP YOU AND  
YOUR FAMILY  
PREVENT DECAY.**