

WATER FLUORIDATION

The benefits for you ...



Richmond Valley Council introduced fluoride into the town's water supply as an aid to improving dental health, based on a directive from the State Government in 2008.

Council and NSW Health, via the North Coast Area Health Service (NCAHS) and the 'Teeth for Life' Program are working together to promote this important public health initiative.

The aim of this fact sheet is to provide information to the community on fluoridation of the public water supply in Casino.

The addition of fluoride is carefully regulated by legislation and a comprehensive Code of Practice. Council has updated its web page with a link to these documents and other fluoride related information.

WHO BENEFITS?

The entire community benefits from water fluoridation regardless of a person's age, income, level of education, or ability to get dental care. Water fluoridation has been practiced in parts of NSW for more than 50 years. Now, more than 90 per cent of the population in NSW receives fluoridated water. A concentration of 1.0 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride can reduce the amount of cavities in children's baby teeth by as much as 60 per cent and in adults' teeth by nearly 35 per cent.

HOW DOES FLUORIDE WORK?

Fluoride in the water supply acts like a constant repair kit for teeth. Tooth decay develops when acid in the mouth produced from sugar and bacteria destroys the outer surface of the tooth. A constant supply of low level fluoride in the mouth can reduce the risk of acid damage and repair any damage before it becomes permanent.

WHAT TYPE OF FLUORIDE WILL BE USED TO FLUORIDATE THE WATER?

Casino's drinking water has a naturally occurring fluoride concentration of up to 0.2 ppm. To reduce the rate of tooth decay, the natural concentration will be increased to 1.0 ppm by adding sodium fluorosilicate to the water supply. This is considered the optimum level of fluoride and is not harmful or toxic.

CAN YOU SMELL OR TASTE FLUORIDE IN WATER?

The fluoride to be used in water fluoridation has no taste or smell. It will not alter the taste or smell of drinking water.

CAN WATER FLUORIDATION CAUSE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

Some people worry that water fluoridation may cause serious problems such as cancer, bone fractures, birth defects, Alzheimer's disease or allergies. The safety of water fluoridation has been frequently re-evaluated and the best evidence does not link water fluoridation with any of these medical conditions. The National Health Service Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York in England undertook a review of 214 of the highest quality water fluoridation studies in 2000 to assess the benefits and possible side effects of water fluoridation. The review found that water fluoridation helps protect against tooth decay without causing any unwanted effects, apart from dental fluorosis in some people.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Governments and health professionals have a responsibility to make decisions which balance the best possible community health outcomes with individual choices. Examples include the mandatory wearing of seat belts, the banning of smoking in work and public places and the immunisation of children.

SIMILAR MEASURES

Examples of other public health preventative measures include the addition of calcium to milk/ breakfast cereals (to improve teeth and bone health), folate to breakfast cereal/ bread (to prevent birth defects), iodine to salt and thiamine to white flour (to improve health outcomes for individuals with poor diets).

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Other reviews from Europe, North America and Australia also support the safety of water fluoridation. Dental fluorosis is the mottling of teeth. It may occur in both fluoridated and non-fluoridated water communities where the intake of fluoride is well in excess of the recommended levels. Dental fluorosis can be minimised by proper use of fluoridated toothpaste, particularly in children under six.

SHOULD MY CHILD CONTINUE TAKING FLUORIDE SUPPLEMENTS?

Fluoride supplements used to be recommended as an alternative source of fluoride in non-fluoridated areas. Current evidence indicates that fluoride supplements in the form of drops or tablets must not be used.

ARE SOME PEOPLE ALLERGIC TO FLUORIDE?

An allergy is a reaction of the immune system to a specific substance. While some people believe they are allergic to fluoride, the symptoms they complain of could be due to other causes. We are all exposed to fluoride. It is very common in our environment, in rocks, soil, our water and food. There is no evidence of allergy or intolerance to fluoride because of fluoridation of community water supplies.

CAN I USE FLUORIDATED WATER WITH INFANT FORMULA?

Infant formula powder was historically marketed with a varying but relatively high fluoride content. Infant formula that now contain very low amounts of fluoride are safe for consumption by infants when reconstituted using fluoridated or non-fluoridated water - this is the Australian recommendation in relation to infant nutrition. The Australian recommendation differs from the American Dental Association's recommendations which are specifically relevant to the United States. Some areas in the United States have naturally occurring fluoride at up to 4 ppm, four times higher than the proposed level of water fluoridation in the Richmond Valley Council area.

DO WATER FILTERS REMOVE FLUORIDE FROM THE WATER?

Many home water filtering systems do not significantly alter the fluoride content of water, although reverse osmosis filters do remove most of the fluoride. Check with the manufacturer for details on your filtering system.



HEALTHY TEETH

Healthy teeth require a combination of a healthy diet, good oral hygiene, appropriate use of fluoridated toothpaste, regular dental checkups and access to fluoridated water.

- Drink plenty of fluoridated water and avoid drinking acidic and sugary drinks between meals.
- Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods and avoid snacking on sugary and sticky foods between meals.
- Start brushing your child's teeth without toothpaste from the time their first teeth erupt to 17 months.
- Use a pea-sized smear of low fluoride toothpaste for children 18 months to 5 years of age.
- Children six years and over should brush twice a day or more with a pea-sized smear of standard fluoridated toothpaste.
- Assist your child with brushing at least once a day until he or she is 8 or 9 years old.
- After brushing your teeth, spit out - do not swallow, do not rinse.

DOES EUROPE USE FLUORIDATED WATER?

In some countries, complex water systems make it impossible to fluoridate. Various fluoride plants in Eastern and Central Europe (during political turmoil in the late 1980s) closed through neglect. Many European countries fortify table salt with fluoride including Germany, Austria, France, Slovakia, Hungary and Belarus. It is important to note that the use of fluoride, whether in water, salt or milk, is the foundation of tooth decay prevention throughout Europe.

For more information, visit:

www.fluoridenow.com.au

www.ada.org.au

www.cdc.gov

www.who.int

www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au

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