

SA Health Fact Sheet

Mount Gambier Fluoridation Project

Q. What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a natural element found in soil, fresh water, sea water, plants and many foods. It is used by the body to strengthen teeth and bones.

Q. Why will Mount Gambier's drinking water be fluoridated?

Water fluoridation is the most effective way to enable everyone to have the benefits of fluoride.

About 90 per cent of South Australians already use fluoridated water. Mount Gambier is the largest centre in South Australia without water fluoridation.

Q. What is water fluoridation?

All water supplies have some natural fluoride in them and the water fluoridation process involves adding fluoride to the level that protects dental health. It does not involve adding anything to the water that is not already there. There is no chemical difference between fluoride present naturally and that which is added to the water supply. The fluoride is added to water supplies in a controlled way, using only amounts scientifically shown to prevent tooth decay.

Many groundwater supplies such as Millicent and Naracoorte have natural fluoride concentrations at optimum level. However for Blue Lake water this is not the case.

Q. How does fluoride work?

Fluoride in water acts like a repair kit for teeth, acting in a number of ways to strengthen teeth and make them more resistant to tooth decay in people of all ages, including the young and the elderly. A constant supply of low level fluoride is best for this.

Tooth decay occurs when acid destroys the tooth surface. Acid is produced from sugar by bacteria in the mouth. Fluoride can limit the amount of damage and can repair the damage before a filling is needed.

Strong teeth result in fewer fillings, fewer extractions, fewer visits to the dentist and lower dental bills - resulting in healthy smiles and fewer dentures.

Water fluoridation is the safest and most cost effective method of providing the population access to the benefits of fluoride.

Since fluoridated water was introduced in Adelaide in 1971, tooth decay among 12 year olds has reduced from an average of more than eight teeth to an average of one tooth with decay.

Q. I already use toothpaste with fluoride added – why do I need fluoride in the water as well?

Water fluoridation gives extra protection against tooth decay, even if you already brush your teeth with fluoridated toothpaste.



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Q. What other areas of South Australia have fluoride in the water?

Approximately 75 percent of all Australians have access to fluoridated water. Queensland, which has higher tooth decay than the rest of Australia, has recently announced plans to increase the coverage of fluoridated water from 5 per cent to 90 per cent of the population by 2012. Victoria is also expanding the use of water fluoridation in rural areas.

Q. Is it safe to drink water with fluoride?

Yes. Drinking fluoridated water with the correct amount of fluoride in the water is not harmful to human health.

Many organisations around the world, including the World Health Organisation, support water fluoridation. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention rated fluoridation one of the 10 most important public health achievements of the twentieth century.

In 2007, after a review of all published information and claims on potential adverse effects, the National Health and Medical Research Council concluded that water fluoridation was safe and effective.

Q. Will there be any harmful chemicals in the water as a result of fluoridation?

No. The compounds most commonly used for fluoridating water dissolve completely in water. Only high quality chemicals are used in fluoridating water supplies.

Fluoride is not toxic. Many substances that we use everyday are beneficial in small amounts, but may be harmful in large amounts, an example is salt. Only very small amounts of fluoride are added to the water.

Q. What level of fluoride will be in the water?

The recommended concentration of fluoride in fluoridated water supplies is 0.7 to 1.0 mg/L (parts per million). SA Water will maintain levels within this range.

Q. Will I be able to smell or taste the fluoride?

No. Fluoridated water does not smell or taste different to non-fluoridated water.

Q. How many people will receive the benefits of fluoridation in Mount Gambier?

The population of Mount Gambier is approximately 25,000. Although children have the most to gain from fluoridated water, anyone drinking from the town water supply will receive some benefits.

If you would like more information about this project you can visit the SA Health's website at www.health.sa.gov.au or call (08) 8226 7100.

