

Water Fluoridation in the City of Waterloo - Frequently Asked Questions -

What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring material found in water, plants, rocks, soil, air and most foods.

How do we get fluoride?

Fluoride is provided mainly through drinking water and toothpaste. Other sources could include mouthwash, supplements (chewing tablets or drops), and other materials such as gels and rinses that may be used during your visit to the dentist.

What is water fluoridation?

Fluoridation is the addition of fluoride to the water so that it contains the amount recommended for the best protection against tooth decay.

What are the health benefits of water fluoridation?

Fluoride helps to prevent tooth decay, or cavities, which can lead to tooth loss over time. Fluoride protects your teeth from childhood right through to the senior years.

Is there any health risk associated with water fluoridation?

- There is no known health risk associated with drinking water fluoridated within the recommended levels.
- Like many other natural substances, fluoride can be harmful if taken in very large amounts. The most common adverse effect is dental fluorosis, which occurs in people who swallow too much fluoride during the years of tooth formation (from 0 to 6 years). In the mildest form, it appears as white flecks on the teeth. In the most severe form, which is rare, brown staining or pitting occurs on the tooth surface. Dental fluorosis affects people who live in communities with or without fluoride in their water supply. The most common sources of too much fluoride are from swallowing toothpaste and fluoride supplements.
- Scientific reviews conducted by a number of international agencies and by Health Canada are in agreement that the weight of evidence from all currently available studies does not support a link between exposure to fluoride in drinking water and adverse health effects such as cancer or lower IQ in children.

Can children get too much fluoride from drinking fluoridated water?

- No, children cannot get too much fluoride from food or from drinking water which is fluoridated at the recommended levels.
- The most common source of too much fluoride is from swallowing toothpaste.
- Parents should supervise their children less than six years of age during brushing and only use a pea-size amount of toothpaste. Children should spit out well after brushing.

Does Region of Waterloo Public Health Support Water Fluoridation?

Region of Waterloo Public Health supports water fluoridation for the prevention of tooth decay. It's a cost effective way to promote oral health for everyone in the community, regardless of their income. The weight of scientific evidence continues to confirm that water fluoridation is a safe and effective public health measure. Health Canada, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the World Health Organization endorse fluoridation of drinking water for the prevention of tooth decay. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Fluoridation of drinking water is one of the ten most successful public health measures of 20th century".

Is Region of Waterloo adding fluoride to the water supply?

Region of Waterloo stopped adding fluoride to the City of Waterloo's municipal drinking water supply on November 29, 2010 after this decision was made by referendum vote.

Is municipal drinking water in Waterloo Region safe to drink?

Yes. Under the Health Protection and Health Promotion Act, the Medical Officer of Health is responsible for preventing, eliminating and decreasing the effects of health hazards. The Medical Officer of Health also has the responsibility to inform the public if there is a potential adverse health impact on them.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, water system operators are required to routinely perform a variety of drinking water quality tests and report the results to the Medical Officer of Health. The Medical Officer of Health monitors the municipal drinking water routinely to ensure it is safe to drink.

Will drinking of non-fluoridated water lead to more cavities?

If you mainly drink water with no fluoride, or low levels of fluoride, you may get more cavities than you would if fluoridated tap water were your main source. Studies have shown that water fluoridation can be expected to reduce the rate of cavities by 30-50 percent in children, and prevent 27 percent of tooth decay in adults.

What can I do to reduce my risk of cavities?

- Practice good oral hygiene, which includes brushing of your teeth at least twice a day using fluoride toothpaste.
- Eat nutritious foods which are low in sugar and avoid snacks between meals
- Avoid drinking beverages which are high in sugar (water is best)
- Make regular visits to a dental professional

Is there special advice for young children?

- When children are infants, parents should clean their child's tooth surfaces after each meal with a wipe or a small toothbrush and water.
- Children should not use fluoride toothpaste until they are age 3, unless they are advised to do so by a dental professional.
- Parents should supervise their children less than six years of age during brushing.
- Once children are able to use fluoride toothpaste, only a small pea-size amount of toothpaste should be used. Children should spit out well after brushing.

Should my children take fluoride supplements?

Fluoride supplements are not generally recommended, and should only be used under the supervision of a dental professional.

How can I find out the level of fluoride in my drinking water?

Call Water Services at 519-575-4757, extension 3155 to find out the fluoride level in your area. If you have a private well, you will have to have it tested by a laboratory. For more information on private well water testing, call Public Health at 519-883-2008.

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