

Advice for communities without water fluoridation

Water Program

Fluoride helps to protect teeth against tooth decay. If your community doesn't have fluoride in its water supply, there are still things you can do to protect your teeth. These messages should not replace advice from an oral health professional.

Since mid-2010, ninety per cent of Victorians receive fluoridated drinking water. This important public health initiative helps provide protection against tooth decay. However fluoridated drinking water is not available to all Victorians because some households don't have reticulated water and not all reticulated supplies can be fluoridated.

Historically, dental professionals recommended fluoride supplements (tablets, drops and lozenges) for people in non-fluoridated communities. Since 2006, the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health has recommended that fluoride supplements that are to be chewed and/or swallowed should not be used. This is primarily due to the increased risk of dental fluorosis (mottling of tooth enamel), especially in young children, or other negative health impacts if excessive fluoride supplements are consumed. Therefore, since 2006, fluoride supplements have been phased out. Dental professionals may still use and recommend fluoride varnishes and mouth rinses.

For those children who live in communities without water fluoridation, or who may be at higher risk of developing tooth decay, guidelines about toothpaste usage should be varied, as needed, only upon seeking advice from an oral health professional. Variations could include more frequent use of fluoridated toothpaste, commencement of toothpaste use at a younger age, or earlier commencement of use of standard toothpaste.

For all people, living in communities without water fluoridation the consumption of foods and beverages processed in nearby fluoridated centres will provide some benefit. Residents from non-fluoridated areas will also gain some protection against tooth decay when they work and study in fluoridated centres.

It is important to follow these guidelines for good oral health:

- Clean teeth and along the gum line at least twice a day
- Use fluoridated toothpaste appropriately:
 - For children aged up to 18 months, clean teeth as soon as they appear (around six months) using a soft toothbrush with a small head. Use only water, do not use toothpaste.
 - For children between the ages of 18 months and five years (inclusive), seek advice from an oral health professional if your child should use a low fluoride toothpaste or standard fluoride toothpaste.
 - For people aged six years and over, seek advice from an oral health professional if you should use a standard fluoride or higher strength fluoride toothpaste.
- Drink plenty of water every day.
- Limit sugary, carbonated drinks, fruit juice and alcohol.
- Children should have an oral health check by the time they turn two. A dentist, oral health therapist, GP or maternal and child health nurse may do this.
- Everybody has different oral health needs. Ask an oral health professional how often you should have a dental check-up.

To find your nearest community dental clinic, click on 'find a clinic' at www.dhsv.org.au. To search for a private dentist, visit www.ada.org.au and use the 'find a dentist' search tool.

For further information, please contact the Department of Health and Human Services water fluoridation telephone information line on 1800 651 723 or visit the water fluoridation website at: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/water-fluoridation>

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone the Water Program on 1800 651 723, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email water@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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