

29 May 2002

New Zealand Dental Association Inc.

Statement on Water Fluoridation

- 1 Fluoride promotes the repair of teeth by aiding remineralisation of the surface. It works best at doing this when it is used in low concentrations, and relatively frequently. Water fluoridation is an efficient, effective and safe way to achieve this remineralisation.
- 2 Water fluoridation is a cost effective way of communities receiving fluoride. ESR research for NZ shows it is cost effective for communities as small as 1000 people.
- 3 Water fluoridation is a benefit to people of all ages with natural teeth. Among young children, decay rates are 20-60% lower than in communities without fluoridation, and in adults 15-35% lower (Newbrun 1989).
- 4 The safety of water fluoridation to general health has been reviewed in New Zealand, and in overseas reviews, including a recent Australian NHMRC report and a large UK review. These studies have consistently found no evidence of adverse general health effects from water fluoridation.
- 5 Dental fluorosis in New Zealand can appear as small white flecks or patches on the tooth surface. In 1989 a NZ study (de Liefde and Herbison) found that while it was present in some children, water fluoridation was not associated with unaesthetic front teeth. To reduce problems with fluorosis it is recommended that toothpaste be issued as a smear on the child's brush and that children don't eat toothpaste.
- 6 When considering the slight white flecking that can occur from fluorosis, it is also necessary to consider the pain and poor appearance caused by dental decay. The effects of decay are much more significant.
- 7 Fluoride is a naturally occurring element. It is found in the air, soil, water, sea water, plants and many foods. In NZ, fluoride occurs naturally in all water supplies, but at a level that is too low to protect against tooth decay. Adjusting the water fluoride level to 0.7-1.0 parts per million will provide the extra protection.