

Media Release – Levin & Ōhau Water supply to be fluoridated by 31 July 2023

Horowhenua District Council is one of 14 local authorities that have received a directive from the Director-General of Health under The Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Act 2021 to start fluoridating its drinking water supply by 31 July 2023.

The Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Act 2021 shifted decision-making on fluoridation from local authorities to the Director-General of Health. This change allows for a nationally consistent approach to community water fluoridation based on its well-established health benefits.

Evidence supporting the Director-General of Health's decision outlines that fluoridation is proven to be a safe, affordable and effective method of preventing tooth decay. Community water fluoridation benefits everyone, but especially children, Māori, Pasifika and our most vulnerable. That's why it is supported by the Pasifika Dental Association and Te Ao Mārama (the NZ Māori Dental Association). Water fluoridation helps prevent tooth decay, along with regular brushing using fluoride toothpaste, eating healthy food and avoiding sugary drinks.

Fluoride in water acts like a constant repair kit for teeth. The role of fluoride in water has been well examined around the world – including in New Zealand – over the past 60 years, with no evidence that it causes any significant health issues at the levels used here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Adding fluoride to water continues to have a positive impact by reducing the incidence of dental cavities in Aotearoa New Zealand and is particularly important in reducing socioeconomic health inequities.*

The estimated cost of introducing fluoridation for the Levin and Ōhau drinking water supply is \$1M with estimated ongoing management and monitoring costs of \$40,000 per annum. Council has applied for funding from the Ministry of Health to install the technology needed to add fluoride to Levin and Ōhau's water supply. However, if Council waits for the outcome of its funding application before installation, it will not meet its deadline of 31 July 2023. In order for planning and procurement to begin immediately, and to ensure Council meets its requirements under the Act, the Horowhenua District Council voted to amend its

capital budget at its 23 November meeting to provide for fluoridation of the Levin and Ōhau water supply. Work will commence early 2023.

Mayor Bernie Wanden said “The fluoridation of the Levin and Ōhau drinking water supply is an important step in improving the oral health of our community.”

“Approximately 20,000 people in the Levin community would benefit from improved oral health because fluoridation would significantly reduce the prevalence and severity of dental decay. He said like all issues there would be “those who have opposing views to science”, but everything said in support of fluoridating water supplies was backed by evidence from Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation*.

Chief Executive Monique Davidson says “The direction from the Ministry has come at a time when the sector is facing many changes – some local, some national. Fluoridation is a contentious topic and it is likely that there will be alternative views held by our community. However, the reports and health outcomes that have resulted in fluoridation in Aotearoa, speak for themselves. Council is obligated to abide by the directive and it’s now time for us to deliver on that directive for our community. The only challenge we now have, is ensuring we don’t have oral health inequities across our district in the future.”

Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health data

The Levin and Ōhau water supply is situated within the previous MidCentral District Health Board area.

The 2020 data for children aged 0-12 in the MidCentral District Health Board area shows:

- overall, 42 percent of children had experienced tooth decay at age five
- on average, children at age five have 1.89 decayed, missing or filled primary teeth, and at school year 8 have on average 1.10 decayed, missing or filled adult teeth
- Māori and Pacific children have significantly worse outcomes than other children within the MidCentral District Health Board area. For example, 59 percent of Māori children had experienced decay at age five compared to 37 percent for all other (non-Māori and non-Pacific) children.

The 2017-2020 New Zealand Health Survey results for Horowhenua District Council shows:

- 67.5 percent of adults (15+) had one or more teeth removed in their lifetime due to decay, an abscess, infection or gum disease
- 7.9 percent of adults (15+) had one or more teeth removed in the past 12 months due to decay, an abscess, infection or gum disease.

Sources:

- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241563192>
- <https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/fluoridation-an-update-on-evidence/>

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/fluoride-and-oral-health/water-fluoridation/national-fluoridation-information-service>

For information relating to the directive from the Director-General of Health contact:

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