

133 Molesworth Street
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
T+64 4 496 2000

23 October 2024

S9(2)(a)

By email: S9(2)(a)
Ref: H2024053160

Tēnā koe S9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 8 October 2024 for information regarding community water fluoridation. Please find a response to each part of your request below.

In your role as Director General of Health, it can be inferred that you have received and read these studies and that you have taken them into account - please advise me otherwise. Please supply evidence recording cumulative levels of fluoride in New Zealand children? Can you point to studies on fluoride accumulation in soft tissues?

In 2014, a comprehensive report was published by the Royal Society Te Apārangi, prepared jointly with the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, reviewing the substantial body of scientific evidence on the efficacy and safety of fluoridation of public water supplies. The report concluded that there are no adverse health effects of any significance from fluoridation levels used in New Zealand. In June 2021, the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor released an evidence update, which confirmed that the conclusions of the 2014 report remain appropriate. These reports discussed fluoride from different sources for different age groups. These reviews are publicly available and you can find them in accordance with section 18(d) of the Act at: www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/fluoridation-an-update-on-evidence/

As was required by the New Zealand High Court, the Director-General is undertaking a Bill of Rights analysis of the 2022 directions to fluoridate to ensure that section 11 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 is considered. This will include consideration of recent scientific studies. The directions remain in place in accordance with High Court rulings.

Your email also mentions the cost of implementing community water fluoridation. A 2015 Sapere report estimated that if community water fluoridation was extended to cover those who do not currently have access to fluoridated water, this has the potential to result in estimated net savings of more than \$600 million over 20 years. These savings will mostly be seen by whānau in reduced costs for dental care, with some savings also to the health care system. You can find this report on the Ministry's website at: www.health.govt.nz/publications/review-of-the-benefits-and-costs-of-water-fluoridation-in-new-zealand

The 36th Conference of the International Society for Fluoride Research takes place in New Delhi from November 12 to 14, 2024. Its theme is: Fluoride toxicity and spectrum of adverse health effects: Challenges of skeletal and non-skeletal fluorosis across ages and new mitigation modalities. Will you be attending?

The Director-General of Health will not be attending this conference.

If the US changes its stance and ends the practice of water fluoridation in the US, will you recommend that New Zealand follow suit?

While it is permissible to seek information by asking questions under the Act, a distinction must be drawn between questions that seek information that is 'held', and questions that seek to elicit an opinion or explanation. The primary purpose of the Act is to allow requesters to seek information 'held' by agencies. It is not a mechanism for requesters to seek an explanation or opinion from an agency. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as no such decision has been made or is held by the Ministry.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests

Nāku noa, nā



Jane Chambers
Group Manager, Public Health Policy and Regulation
Public Health Agency | Te Pou Hauora Tūmatanui