

11 November 2021

Tēnā koe

This letter is to update you on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill (the Bill) and what it means for you.

As you may be aware, on Tuesday 9 November 2021, the Bill passed its final reading and will come into force 28 days after Royal assent. The new legislation amends the Health Act 1956 to give the Director-General of Health the power to issue a direction to local authority water suppliers (including bulk water suppliers) to fluoridate a public drinking water supply. The changes do not apply to private drinking water supplies.

Key content of the new legislation

Under the new legislation, when deciding whether to issue a direction to fluoridate, the Director-General of Health will be required to consider for each individual drinking water supply:

- the scientific evidence on the effectiveness of adding fluoride to drinking water in reducing the prevalence and severity of dental decay
- whether the benefits of adding fluoride to the drinking water outweigh the financial costs, taking into account:
 - the state or likely state of the oral health of the local community or population group associated with the water supply
 - the number of people who are reasonably likely to receive drinking water from the local authority supply
 - the likely financial costs and savings of adding fluoride to the drinking water, including any additional costs of ongoing management and monitoring.

Before issuing any direction to fluoridate, the Director-General of Health must seek written comment from the local authorities on the estimated cost of introducing community water fluoridation, and the date by which the local authority could comply.

The new legislation exempts you from any requirement to consult with your communities on the decision to fluoridate.

Further information on these changes and the obligations for local authorities is in the attached fact sheet.

Implementation

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) intends to facilitate swift transition to the new fluoridation decision-making process, and anticipates that the Director-General of Health could commence issuing directions from mid-2022 onwards. Implementation will be phased over time and there will be some funding available to support local authorities with the costs of fluoridation-related capital works.

The Ministry is working through implementation details and expects to be able to provide further information to you in the next month.

The Ministry acknowledges the significance of the Government's Three Waters Reform programme on local authorities, including the recent announcement of the creation of the new water service entities. The Ministry of Health is working closely with the Department of Internal Affairs to ensure that implementation planning aligns with the reform programme and factors in current service delivery pressures across the water services sector.

Resources for your communities

You may receive queries from your communities about community water fluoridation now that the new legislation has been passed. We encourage you to refer members of the public or interested groups to the resources below. They reflect the position of the Ministry of Health, World Health Organization, and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention that community water fluoridation is a safe, effective and affordable public health measure to improve the oral health of communities.

<https://www.fluoridefacts.govt.nz/>

<https://www.pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/fluoridation-an-update-on-evidence/>

We look forward to working with you to implement these new changes that will have an important health impact on the communities you serve. We will be in touch again shortly.

Ngā mihi



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