



The Royal Australasian  
College of Physicians

*New Zealand*

## Media Release

### **Water fluoridation: The most effective preventive oral health measure for New Zealand children**

Tuesday 19 February, 2013

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) strongly supports the fluoridation of community drinking water throughout New Zealand as an effective, safe and equitable method of preventing dental caries and promoting good oral health in children and young people.

Physicians and Paediatricians regularly see the devastating impact of poor oral health in children and believe that good oral health plays an integral part in the overall health and wellbeing of children and young people.

According to Dr Roger Tuck, a Whangarei paediatrician, who regularly sees children presenting with poor oral health status, more needs to be done from a public health perspective to help ensure the oral health of children and adolescents.

“While the onus is appropriately placed upon parents and caregivers to ensure children have healthy diets and dental habits conducive to good oral health, many children are not fortunate enough to experience these basic cares”, Dr Tuck says.

“The far-reaching effects of water fluoridation ensure all children are habitually exposed to at least one preventive oral health measure”.

The RACP affirms community water fluoridation as the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay and improve oral health.

“Many scientific reviews provide strong and compelling evidence that community water fluoridation is not only an effective and cost-saving method for reducing tooth decay but it is regarded as one of the ‘top ten’ public health interventions of all time<sup>12</sup>”, public health physician Associate Professor Chris Bullen says.

Of concern to the RACP is the current regional variation of communities receiving fluoridated water around the country. This results in oral health inequities for children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health (2010) *Our Oral Health: Key findings of the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999) *Achievements in Public Health, 1900-1999: Fluoridation of Drinking Water to Prevent Dental Caries*. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4841a1.htm>

There are consistent socio-economic and ethnic inequalities in oral health status in New Zealand and water fluoridation benefits all people regardless of circumstance.

“One of the best things about community water fluoridation is that everyone benefits simply by consuming food and drink prepared with fluoridated water, therefore water fluoridation is a key way to reduce inequalities in oral health”, says Associate Professor Bullen.

RACP reiterates that fluoride is a naturally occurring substance already present at low levels in New Zealand’s fresh water. Community water fluoridation, at the optimal level of 0.7-1.0 ppm, is therefore a supplementary health measure.

RACP is aware that the Fluoride Action Network of New Zealand (FANNZ) is hosting a visiting anti-fluoride academic from the United States to speak in areas where water fluoridation is currently being debated. The potential impact these events and the generated media coverage will have on public knowledge and perspectives on water fluoridation is concerning.

To help the public make an informed decision on the topic of water fluoridation, the RACP encourages public health agencies and the Ministry of Health to promote the multitude of quality information and research that is publicly available.

The RACP calls on government health bodies to be proactive, focusing in the areas where water fluoridation has not yet been introduced or is being debated, to ensure information outlining the rationale for fluoridation is readily accessible and actively promoted.

In September 2012, the RACP and the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons released a joint position statement ‘Physicians and dentists collaborate on oral health in children and young people’, advocating for water fluoridation. Please [click here](#) to access this position statement.

## Ends

**About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP):** The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 13,500 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 5,000 trainees, across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 25 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, general medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. [www.racp.edu.au](http://www.racp.edu.au)

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