

SCIENCE AND DATA LEAD TO CHANGES IN WATER FLUORIDATION PRACTICES

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Fluoride is a naturally occurring ion found in most water systems. It is generally detected at low levels, often too low to protect against or prevent tooth decay and other dental caries. Water fluoridation is the process of adding fluoride to the naturally occurring amount to achieve an optimal level statistically proven to protect against tooth decay. For over 70 years science has repeatedly determined that water fluoridation at the optimal level will significantly improve the consumers level of oral health.

The practice of water fluoridation is regulated by each state individually, with technical assistance, scientific data, and statistics provided by numerous studies and federal agencies such as the USEPA, Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Each state therefore establishes their own optimal level, as well as MCL, generally based on the assistance and recommendations of these federal agencies. In New York State, the current optimal level for water fluoridation is between 0.8 mg/L – 1.2 mg/L, with the target dose being 1.0 mg/L. The decision whether or not to provide water fluoridation within a community in NYS is also a local issue. Each water system or community has the right to decide if this practice is right for them, with no mandate coming from the state level.

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and we here at the NYRWA as a state affiliate, neither promote nor deter water systems from providing fluoridation. We strongly feel it is a local matter, and therefore a decision should come from the local residents and governing body. The NYRWA does however provide classroom and onsite training, onsite assessments, and provide assistance with grant funding of equipment for water systems that choose to fluoridate. Our efforts are focused on assisting each system in providing optimal fluoridation through education, maintenance, and proper operation of the fluoridation system.

Since 1962 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recommended a target range for optimal water fluoridation between 0.7 mg/L – 1.2 mg/L, slightly different than the recommendation from the NYSDOH. On Monday, April 27, 2015, after much anticipation for those of us involved in water fluoridation, they released the final Public Health Service recommendation for the optimal fluoride level in drinking water to prevent tooth decay. The new recommendation is for a single level of 0.7 mg/L. We wish to advise everyone that this is

a recommendation from a federal agency. In NYS we still need to abide by the levels established by the NYSDOH. However, this HHS recommendation will likely lead to the NYSDOH establishing a new standard.

So why the change? Studies and research on water fluoridation are constantly ongoing. The CDC provides a great deal of technical assistance and training to the states to assist them with system issues, as well as data to make informed decisions. One goal is to determine what level or optimal level provides for the best level of oral health at the least cost possible to the water system. This change in recommendation achieves that goal. Further, the change was recommended because Americans now have access to more sources of fluoride, such as toothpaste, and mouth rinses, than they did when fluoridation was first introduced in the United States. The U.S. Deputy Surgeon General Rear Admiral Boris D. Lushniak, M.D., M.P.H. stated, “while additional sources of fluoride are more widely used than they were in 1962, the need for community water fluoridation still continues.” He went on to say, “community water fluoridation continues to reduce tooth decay in children and adults beyond that provided by using only toothpaste and other fluoride-containing products.” It was also noted that the Centers for Disease Control named water fluoridation as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. Dr. Lushniak concluded by saying, “community water fluoridation is effective, inexpensive and does not depend on access or availability of professional services. It has been the basis for the primary prevention of tooth decay for nearly 70 years.”

Now that this anticipated new recommendation has been issued, we anticipate the NYSDOH will follow suit, and issue a new optimal level for water fluoridation. Speculation is that the NYSDOH will establish 0.8 mg/L as a target, but again, that is mere speculation at this point. We here at the NYRWA wish you all the best this summer, and for those of you who operate a fluoridated system, we hope these new recommendations will help you to continue to provide water fluoridation at an inexpensive level and continue to provide...Quality on Tap!!! 💧💧💧

