

Fluoride and Drinking Water

What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a mineral that protects teeth against tooth decay. Many communities in Canada add fluoride to the local water supply. In some parts of Huron County fluoride is found naturally in well water. People also get fluoride from food and dental products like toothpaste or mouthwash. Over the years the amount of fluoride that we take in from all these sources has been rising.

High fluoride levels

In some wells in Huron County, natural levels of fluoride are high enough to change the appearance of the teeth. This condition is called dental fluorosis. The effect on the teeth may vary from small white flecks to larger white areas and in severe cases, to pitting or brown areas.

Fluorosis usually happens during a child's early years when the teeth are still forming below the gums. It does not occur after the tooth erupts into the mouth. Most cases are mild. Fluorosis is not a health problem, but it can be avoided.

Should I test for fluoride?

If you live in a municipality or get your water from a communal water supply, your water has already been tested for fluoride. You can check with the municipality or the operator to find out the fluoride level.

Preventing Fluorosis in Young Children

- use a non-fluoride toothpaste or no toothpaste until the child is two years of age, unless a dental professional advises otherwise
- beginning at age two, use a fluoride toothpaste but only two times a day
- use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste
- teach your child not to swallow toothpaste but to spit out excess toothpaste and rinse well after brushing.

Additional recommendations for children under age seven if the fluoride level is above 1.5 mg/L

- continue with a non-fluoride toothpaste until age seven
- do not use mouthwash or mouth rinses that contain fluoride. Check the label to find out the fluoride content.
- do not use fluoride supplements
- a fluoride treatment at the dentist should have very little chance of contributing to fluorosis; however you may wish to talk this over with your dentist
- until children are age seven, consider using water from another source with a lower fluoride level (eg non-fluoridated bottled water) for drinking, cooking and mixing frozen fruit juices. Alternately you could consider a water treatment device such as reverse osmosis to remove fluoride. Brita filters do not remove fluoride.
- use non-fluoridated water for mixing baby formula.

A water treatment device may be installed to reduce the level of fluoride to an acceptable level. Contact the public health unit and/or a water treatment professional when selecting, installing and operating a treatment system. Note: the Health Unit does not recommend water distillers to produce water used to make baby formula.

For more information, check with your dentist or contact the Huron Perth Public Health at 1-888-221-2133.