



# FLUORIDATION OF WATER SUPPLY



Dubbo Regional Council wishes to advise residents in Dubbo and Wellington of failures of infrastructure at the John Gilbert Water Treatment Plant in Dubbo and the Wellington Water Treatment Plant that has prevented the fluoridation of Dubbo and Wellington's water supply.

## **IN DUBBO**

In January 2019 Council staff formally advised the Water unit of Health NSW that Council was not able to fluoridate the water supply due to a leaking storage tank. This was proposed to be a temporary halt to fluoridation and repair works would be required to the storage facilities.

Hunter H2O was engaged by Council in March 2019 to undertake an audit of Council's facilities that operate Ferric Chloride and Hydrofluorosilicic Acid dosing at the John Gilbert Water Treatment Plant. Hydrofluorosilicic Acid (HSFA) dosing is the chemical treatment to input fluoride into the water supply to meet its obligations under the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957.

The audit showed that Council was non-compliant with the Australian Standard for the storage and handling of corrosive substances (AS3780) and the NSW Code of Practice for Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies.

Since this time, Dubbo's water supply has not received any fluoride.

Dubbo Regional Council (DRC)'s CEO, Murray Wood was made aware of the circumstances in April 2022 and has since had meetings with the relevant regulatory bodies to investigate. DRC has engaged Public Works to assess the situation and to develop a clear scope of work to replace fluoride storage and dosing infrastructure at the water treatment plant so Council can meet its obligations under the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957. The report recommends that the works be undertaken in the 2022/23 financial year.

DRC takes full responsibility for this failure in service delivery, recognising the community relies on the Council to ensure their responsibilities are upheld. Undertaking repair works to storage facilities at John Gilbert Water Treatment Plant is now being addressed as a priority.

## **IN WELLINGTON**

The Fluoride Dosing System at Wellington's Water Treatment Plant has failed which means fluoride is not currently provided in Wellington's potable water supply.

The water produced at the Wellington Water Treatment Plant meets the required control points for provision of safe drinking water and as such is suitable for all consumption.

The entirety of Wellington's potable water supply is affected including Wellington township, Montelores, Nanima Village, Wellington Caves, Wellington Correctional Centre and Macquarie Correctional Centre.

Undertaking repair works is being addressed as a priority at Wellington's Water Treatment Plant and updates will be provided.

If you have a question not answered below, please contact Council's Customer Experience team at [council@dubbo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@dubbo.nsw.gov.au) or on 02 6801 4000.

## WHAT IS WATER FLUORIDATION?

Water fluoridation is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride in drinking water to an optimal level to help reduce tooth decay. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) supports Australian states and territories fluoridating their drinking water supplies within the range of 0.6 to 1.1 milligrams of fluoride per litre (mg/L) (3).

## IS THERE ANY FLUORIDE AT ALL IN DUBBO OR WELLINGTON WATER SUPPLIES?

Dubbo and Wellington water supplies currently only includes natural fluoridation which ranges from 0.08 – 0.12 milligrams of fluoride per litre (mg/L) (3). Fluoride (F-) is a chemical ion of the element fluorine (F) and is part of the earth's crust (2). It is a naturally occurring component of mineral salts found in rocks, soil, natural water sources, plants and animals. The amount of fluoride naturally occurring in water depends on the type of soil and rock through which the water drains.

## WHY HAVE THE COMMUNITY NOT BEEN MADE AWARE OF THIS UNTIL NOW?

We apologise that this has not been proactively communicated to residents connected to the Dubbo water supply. As soon as the new CEO was made aware in April, we made steps to understand the issue, held a meeting with NSW Health and DPE Water to discuss the matter and now we are communicating what we know.

Residents connected to the Wellington water supply have been notified as soon as the issue was identified.

## DID NSW HEALTH KNOW?

Yes.

In January 2019 Council staff formally advised the Water unit of NSW Health that Council was not able to fluoridate the Dubbo water supply due to a leaking storage tank. Regular communication has taken place since this time.

In January 2023 Council staff formally advised the Water unit of NSW Health that Council was not able to fluoridate the Wellington water supply due to failure of a pump.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS?

Council is responsible for upholding the obligations under the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957.

## DOES THIS ONLY APPLY TO WATER IN DUBBO AND

## WELLINGTON?

No. This applies to potable town water in Dubbo; also covering the areas of other localities including Wongarbon, Eumungerie, Ballimore, Mogriguy, and Brocklehurst. It also applies to Wellington and Geurie properties, as well as Monte'lores, Nanima Village, Wellington Caves, Wellington Correctional Centre and Macquarie Correctional Centre.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME AND/OR MY FAMILY?

A lack of fluoridation will not cause any adverse health issues. There is consistent and reliable evidence that community water fluoridation helps to reduce tooth decay. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) found that water fluoridation reduces tooth decay by 26 to 44% in children and adolescents, and by about 27% in adults (1). Recent Australian research suggests that access to fluoridated water from an early age is associated with less tooth decay in adults.

For any oral health related questions, please contact your regular Dental Practitioner.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE TO FIX THIS ISSUE?

Dubbo Regional Council have engaged Public Works to assess the failure of the Hydrofluorosilicic Acid (HSFA) storage unit at Council's John Gilbert Water Treatment Plant and to develop a scope of works, to resolve the issue. Council will communicate the strategy as it becomes available.

Dubbo Regional Council has been advised the pump at Wellington's Water Treatment Plant cannot be repaired and must be replaced. Due to

the specialised nature of the pump, estimated delivery time for the replacement pump is currently Mid-March 2023.

## HOW DOES FLUORIDE IN DRINKING WATER HELP REDUCE TOOTH DECAY?

Fluoride in drinking water acts like a repair kit for teeth, working in a number of ways to strengthen teeth and make them more resistant to tooth decay for people of all ages (22). There are two ways in which the fluoride in drinking water acts to reduce tooth decay:

- Reducing demineralisation (i.e. where the enamel begins to dissolve). This makes teeth more resistant to decay.
- Enhancing remineralisation (i.e. recovery of weakened enamel). This helps the repair of early tooth decay. Fluoride also slows the activity of bacteria that cause decay and combines with enamel on the tooth surface to make it stronger and better able to resist decay.

## MORE INFORMATION

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) hyperlink:  
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/2017-public-statement-water-fluoridation-and-human-health>

For more information on fluoride, head to <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/water/Pages/fluoridation.aspx>

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