



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Primary Care and Patient Safety*

*39 Victoria Street
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Iain Stewart MP

By email to: iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk

30 March 2022

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 March on behalf of a number of your constituents, about water fluoridation.

Water fluoridation is covered by the Water Industry Act 1991. Fluoride is naturally present in most water supplies and is not classified as a medicine in England. There are areas of the country where levels of fluoride in drinking water are naturally at similar levels to those seen in fluoridation schemes.

Water fluoridation is a public health measure and not a medical treatment designed for an individual. Decisions on public health measures are made following public consultation and based on a thorough assessment of the benefits and any potential harms.

Local authorities have responsibility for oral health improvement in their areas and a number of them already have oral health improvement programmes in place, such as supervised toothbrushing. Water fluoridation and other oral health improvement programmes complement each other. Water fluoridation, unlike other programmes, has the advantage that it does not rely on behaviour change to improve oral health.

Not all water that is treated by water companies for customers ends up being consumed, with much of it used for other purposes. For example, tap water is treated to ensure that it is safe to drink on the principle that it needs to be fit for consumption even though not all of it will be used for drinking and cooking.

Scientific reviews report that there is no evidence of risks to the environment from water fluoridation schemes.

The World Health Organization recommends a maximum concentration of fluoride in water of 1.5 milligrams per litre. This level is intended to protect against any ill effects over a lifetime of consumption and has been set with the acknowledgement of potential other fluoride sources, such as diet and toothpaste. In England, this is governed by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations. The target level for water fluoridation schemes is one milligram per litre and is lower than the maximum concentration allowed.

Globally, there have been water fluoridation schemes for over 75 years. In England, the first schemes started over 40 years ago. There have been several authoritative reviews of the scientific evidence looking at both the impact on dental and general health. These reviews have concluded that there is no convincing evidence of adverse health effects from water fluoridation, and that it is a safe and effective public health measure. These reviews have also concurred that fluoridated water has significant dental health benefits.

More information on the evidence on water fluoridation can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'Improving oral health: a community water fluoridation toolkit for local authorities'.

The four UK Chief Medical Officers also published a statement on water fluoridation. This reported that, on balance, *there is strong scientific evidence that water fluoridation is an effective public health intervention for reducing the prevalence of tooth decay and improving dental health equality across the UK*. The statement can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'CMO water fluoridation'.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria'.

MARIA CAULFIELD