

FAQs – Local government fluoridation decisions

October 2024 Version 3.0

Under the *Water Fluoridation Act 2008* (the Act) each local government in Queensland can decide whether the town water supplies within their area are fluoridated.

Deciding to commence fluoridation

Can a local government elect to commence adding fluoride a drinking water supply that is not currently fluoridated?

Yes.

What is the process?

Prior to commencing fluoridation of a water supply, the Act requires that the local government must have decided that commencing fluoridation is in the best interests of the community.

Once a decision has been made, the local government must notify Queensland Health and notify the relevant local community by publishing a notice detailing the nature of the decision in a publicly accessible way (e.g., on the local government's website or in a newspaper circulating in the area serviced by the water supply to which the decision relates).

If the local government is not the water supplier for the community, the water supplier must be informed of the decision and is required to implement it (refer to the section below titled '*Fluoridation decisions where the local government is not the water supplier*').

At least 30 days prior to commencing fluoridation, the water supplier must notify Queensland Health and again notify the relevant local community by publishing a notice in a publicly accessible way indicating the date it intends to commence fluoridation.

Is there funding available for infrastructure?

The Queensland Government does not currently have a specific funding program for water fluoridation infrastructure. If a funding application is made via a general water infrastructure program or other funding scheme, Queensland Health is often able to provide a letter of support.

Is there funding available to meet operation and maintenance costs?

The Queensland Government does not currently have a funding program to assist with operation and maintenance costs associated with water fluoridation.

Deciding to cease fluoridation

Can a local government elect to cease the supply of fluoridated water to communities that are currently fluoridated?

Yes.

What is the process?

Prior to ceasing fluoridation of a water supply that is currently fluoridated, the local government must have decided that ceasing fluoridation is in the best interests of the community.

Once a decision has been made, the local government must notify Queensland Health and notify the relevant local community by publishing a notice detailing the nature of the decision in a publicly accessible way (e.g., on the local government's website or in a newspaper circulating in the area serviced by the water supply to which the decision relates).

If the local government is not the water supplier for the community, the water supplier must be informed of the decision and is required to implement it (refer to the section below titled '*Fluoridation decisions where the local government is not the water supplier*').

At least 30 days prior to ceasing fluoridation, the water supplier must notify Queensland Health and again notify the relevant local community by publishing a notice in a publicly accessible way indicating the date it intends to cease fluoridation.

If a decision is made to cease fluoridation, should the water fluoridation facility be decommissioned?

Yes. Where a decision to cease fluoridation is made under the Act, the water supplier should ensure that the fluoride dosing facility is fully decommissioned and any remaining fluoride compounds are disposed of or removed from site.

Decommissioning should include the physical removal of the fluoride injection point, not just turning off the valve. The water supplier may decommission or dispose of water fluoridation assets as they wish so long as they do not breach environmental protection, work health and safety or public health legislation.

Following the decommissioning of fluoride dosing infrastructure, documentation such as Drinking Water Quality Management Plans, standard operating procedures, workplace health and safety manuals and site induction procedures should also be updated.

Queensland Health can provide further guidance on decommissioning upon request.

Fluoridation decisions where the local government is not the water supplier

Where the local government is not the water supplier, who makes the decision about whether fluoridation is in the best interests of the community?

The decision as to whether fluoridation is in the best interests of the community is always to be made by the local government.

Where the local government is not the water supplier, the Act requires that the local government must consult with the water supplier about the cost implications, infrastructure

arrangements and potential impact on other water supplies, before making a decision as to whether fluoridation is in the best interests of a community.

Where the local government is not the water supplier, does the water supplier have to act on the decision to implement or cease fluoridation for a community?

Yes. The Act states that the water supplier must comply with the decision made by the local government.

Where the local government is not the water supplier and there are costs to the water supplier associated with implementing or ceasing fluoridation in line with a local government decision, who pays?

If a water supplier incurs costs in complying with the decision of a local government to implement or cease fluoridation, the Act requires the local government to meet these costs.

Best interests of the community

How does a local government determine whether fluoridation is in the best interests of a community?

Queensland Health cannot direct a local government as to how they determine whether fluoridation is in the best interests of a community.

Local governments should note that fluoridation has been proven as a safe, effective and ethical means of preventing tooth decay, for people of all ages and not just for children. It is supported by peak health bodies including the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australia Dental Association, the Australian Medical Association and the World Health Organization.

When considering whether fluoridation is in the best interests of a community, Queensland Health recommends local governments consider the significant oral health benefits that are associated with drinking water fluoridation.

Miscellaneous questions

Will the state indemnify a local government against all costs and expenses properly incurred, and not recovered by it, in relation to any proceeding taken against the local government as result of making a fluoridation decision?

Yes, under section 96 of the Act, the State can indemnify a local government against all costs and expenses properly incurred, and not recovered, in relation to any civil proceeding in a court taken against the local government as a result of making a fluoridation decision.

What requirements does a water supplier have to comply with if they decide to continue or proceed with the implementation of fluoridation?

A water supplier adding fluoride to a public potable water supply must comply with the requirements of the *Water Fluoridation Act 2008*, the *Water Fluoridation Regulation 2020* and *Queensland Water Fluoridation Code of Practice*.

Can fluoride tablets be provided as an alternative to water fluoridation?

Fluoride supplements, such as tablets and drops, do not provide the same benefit as water fluoridation for several reasons:

- they are most likely to be used by the people who need them least—children with good oral hygiene and healthy diets
- people who brush their teeth regularly with fluoridated toothpaste receive little, if any, additional benefit from fluoride tablets when sucked or swallowed once a day
- people may not remember to take them, or may take too many
- they increase the risk of dental fluorosis, without clear benefits
- animal experiments have shown that fluoride given once a day is more likely to cause fluorosis than the same amount of fluoride given intermittently throughout the day, as occurs with fluoridated water.

Since 2006, the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health has recommended that fluoride supplements should not be used. Therefore, since 2006, fluoride supplements have been progressively phased out nationwide.

Queensland Health does not support the use of fluoride tablets.