

Water Fluoridation Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is fluoride in California drinking water safe?

A: Yes, California's drinking water is safe. Fluoride is maintained at the optimal level of 0.7 mg/L to prevent tooth decay and support good oral health. Fluoride levels are monitored daily to ensure they remain within the state's strict safety level which is even more strict than national EPA standards.

Q: How does fluoride actually prevent cavities?

A: Fluoride helps teeth in two ways: (1) it strengthens teeth enamel so acids from food and bacteria can't break it down as easily, and (2) it repairs tiny weak spots in teeth before they turn into cavities. Drinking fluoridated water means your teeth get this protection all day and night.

Q: I've heard it could affect children's brain development. Is this true?

A: The studies raising concern mostly come from places where natural fluoride levels are much higher than United States, often several times higher.

A: A U.S. study on recommended fluoride levels, published in *Science Advances*, found that children raised with optimal fluoridation show modest cognitive benefits in secondary school.

A: For reference, the U.S. Public Health Service recommends an optimal fluoride concentration of 0.7 mg/L.

Q: What about babies and infant formulas?

A: Fluoridated water is safe for mixing with infant formulas. The only possible effect is very mild dental fluorosis (faint white streaks on teeth), which is cosmetic and not harmful. The cavity-prevention benefits far outweigh this risk. Parents who want to reduce the chance of fluorosis can use ready-to-feed formula or mix powdered/concentrated formula with bottled or purified water.

Q: Isn't fluoride toothpaste enough?

A: Toothpaste helps, but fluoridated water provides steady, daily protection for everyone, including people who may not brush regularly or have access to dental care. Toothpaste increases the amount of fluoride in saliva and dental plaque for 1–2 hours after brushing.

A: Together, water fluoridation and fluoride toothpaste offer the strongest protection.

Q: What happens if we stop fluoridating water?

A: Communities that have stopped fluoridation see more cavities, more costly dental treatments, and worse oral health outcomes—especially for children. These children are more likely to miss school due to dental issues, which can hinder academic performance, overall well-being, and success later in life. That's why many cities that stopped fluoridation (like Calgary and Juneau) are bringing it back.