

Fluoridation of Public Water Systems: Federal, State, and Local Roles

Fluoride is a mineral found naturally in the environment, including in soil, rocks, and water. It can also be added to everyday products like toothpaste, mouthwash, and drinking water. Fluoride is commonly used to help prevent cavities and tooth decay.

Community Water Fluoridation is a public health practice used in many communities across the U.S. It involves adjusting the amount of fluoride in public drinking water to a level that helps reduce tooth decay. Some water systems naturally have fluoride; others may choose to add it.

Level of Government	Agency/Entity	Role in Water Fluoridation
Federal	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Sets enforceable maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) for fluoride under the Safe Drinking Water Act; regulates public water systems for safety.
	U.S. Public Health Services (USPHS)	Recommends the optimal fluoride level (currently 0.7 mg/L); provides non-binding guidance for states and local governments on water fluoridation to promote oral health.
	U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	Regulates fluoride in consumer products (toothpaste, supplements, bottled water); coordinates with other agencies to ensure product safety and consumer protection.
	U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Tracks fluoride levels in food and beverages; provides dietary intake guidance.
State	Washington State Board of Health (Board)	Sets health and safety standards for Group A public water systems in Washington under chapter 246-290 WAC; establishes the optimal fluoride level for systems that practice water fluoridation; adopts federal MCL standards. The Board does not mandate or prevent community water fluoridation.
	Washington State Department of Health (Department)	Enforces the rules established in Chapter 246-290 WAC; conducted the Fluoride Science Review Panel to review the emerging science and provide recommendations to the Board for review.
Local	Public Water Systems / Local Governments	Make the final decision on whether to fluoridate water; implement fluoridation policies following state standards if chosen.