

BFS welcomes new public opinion survey supporting water fluoridation in Scotland

The British Fluoridation Society (BFS) has welcomed the findings of its latest academic survey which confirms public support in Scotland for water fluoridation to improve oral health and combat dental health inequalities.

At present, no-one in Scotland benefits from artificial water fluoridation and there have been no recent reports published about public opinion on the issue.

Published in the *BDJ* in August, the new report, commissioned by the BFS, *Public attitudes to water fluoridation in Scotland*,¹ contains the results of a robust public opinion survey on community water fluoridation to address this absence.

The survey set out to gauge public attitudes in three urban areas of Scotland to determine respondents' sources of information, awareness of the current fluoridation status of their local water supply and attitude to community water fluoridation. It was conducted using a face-to-face interview with 410 people of mixed ages and gender.

Colwyn Jones, honorary senior lecturer at Edinburgh University, an executive member of the BFS and lead author of the report, said: 'The results demonstrate few people have heard recent news about water fluoridation, a minority of people believe they already have fluoridated water, and as in the rest of the UK, the majority of the Scottish population support community water fluoridation.'



Colwyn Jones

'Fluoride occurs naturally and on The Scottish Water website, I discovered that my home water supply, along with about 500,000 Edinburgh residents, is shared with the Scottish (Holyrood) Parliament. Last year it had a mean level of 0.12 ppm fluoride. This natural level of the mineral fluoride, shared by Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) would need to be increased by a factor of around nine, to reduce tooth decay.

'However, owing not to dithering, but deliberate government inaction, no one benefits from water fluoridation in Scotland. The 2018 Scottish Oral Health Improvement Plan stated, "Although we recognise that water fluoridation could make a positive contribution to improvements in oral health, the practicalities of implementing this means we have taken the view that alternative solutions are more achievable". We belatedly await publication of these "alternative solutions".'

This latest study follows from one conducted in North East England in 2021: *Public attitudes to water fluoridation in the North East of England*.²

Dr Ray Lowry, secretary to the BFS, said: 'When this Scottish study is placed in the context of other sufficiently robust national surveys conducted over the years, it is clear the level of opposition to water fluoridation remains consistently low. This is contrary to what opponents would have us believe.

'If seeking the opinions of the public is done in an open and unbiased way, the support for fluoridation remains high and this is now confirmed in Scotland. It is important that water fluoridation has the continued support of the public, but it is not enough to take it for granted. For its success to be achieved for the many, we need to ensure sure everyone understands the health benefits.'

References

1. Jones C, Lowry R J, Brophy R. Public attitudes to water fluoridation in Scotland. *Br Dent J* 2022; doi: 10.1038/s41415-022-4506-1.
2. Lowry R J, Brophy R, Lennon M A. Public attitudes to water fluoridation in the North East of England. *Br Dent J* 2021; doi: 10.1038/s41415-021-3074-0.

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