

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****March 31, 2026**

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SUBJECT: FLUORIDE IN DRINKING WATER

The purpose of this Informal Report is to provide information about fluoride in the City's drinking water and the recent United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) announcement regarding fluoride.

History of community fluoridation

Fluoride's benefits for teeth were discovered in the 1930's. Dental scientists observed low tooth decay rates among people whose water supplies contained naturally occurring fluoride. Studies conducted in the 1940's and 1950's confirmed that when a small amount of fluoride is added to the public water supply, tooth decay rates among residents decrease. Although these studies focused primarily on the benefits of water fluoridation for children, later studies demonstrated that tooth decay rates in adults are also reduced as a result of water fluoridation.

Water fluoridation prevents tooth decay in two ways: primarily through direct contact with teeth, and when consumed by children during the tooth forming years. The most inexpensive way to deliver the benefits of fluoride to all residents of a community is through water fluoridation.

The American Dental Association, the National Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics support and endorse the fluoridation of community water supplies.

History of fluoridation in Fort Worth

On October 12, 1964, the Fort Worth City Council approved supplementing the fluoride content in the public water system. City Council instructed the Water Department to "proceed immediately with acquisition of equipment and supplies and take further action as is necessary for introduction of fluoride to the City of Fort Worth water supply in such quantities as are required to maintain fluoride concentration at the level recommended by the Public Health Authorities."

The Water Department has been supplementing the fluoride concentration in the public water system since February 1965. Fort Worth's raw water contains approximately 0.2 to 0.3 milligrams per liter (mg/l) concentration of naturally occurring fluoride. The Water Department adds fluoride during the water treatment process to achieve the optimal recommended level and distributes potable water to retail and 33 wholesale customers, consisting of a population of approximately 1.5 million people. In 2025, the Water Department spent \$334,148 on the purchase of fluoride.

Public health agency recommendations

The U.S. Public Health Service's recommended fluoride concentration in drinking water (also called the optimal level) is 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water. This is about equal to 3 drops of water in a 55-gallon barrel.

CDC named fluoridation of drinking water one of 10 great public health interventions of the 20th century because of the dramatic decline in cavities since community water fluoridation started in 1945. The CDC website states:

- Studies continue to show that widespread community water fluoridation prevents cavities and saves money, both for families and the health care system.
- Drinking fluoridated water keeps teeth strong and reduces cavities by about 25% in children and adults. This results in less mouth pain, fewer fillings or teeth pulled, and fewer missed days of work and school.

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- Communities of 1,000 or more people see an average estimated return on investment (ROI) of \$20 for every \$1 spent on water fluoridation. The ROI for community water fluoridation increases as the community size increases, but even small communities save money. Communities served by fluoridated water save an average of \$32 per person a year by avoiding treatment for cavities.

Recent EPA announcement regarding fluoride

On January 22, 2026, EPA announced its release of the “Review of Science on Fluoride in Drinking Water: Preliminary Assessment Plan and Literature Survey.” The announcement may be viewed on the EPA website: <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-announces-next-step-gold-standard-review-fluoride-inform-protective>

The Preliminary Assessment Plan and Literature Survey document outlines the transparent and systematic approach EPA intends to follow in evaluating scientific studies of fluoride health effects. The plan describes the key science issues EPA will consider, including sensitive populations such as infants and children, and compiles a literature survey of relevant health effects studies to be evaluated in the assessment. The plan was published in the Federal Register on January 28, and EPA is accepting public comments on the plan through February 27, 2026.

The water utility will monitor EPA’s review of fluoride’s health effects.

For questions regarding this information, please contact Water Director Chris Harder at (817) 392-5020 with any questions.

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