

Call for Southampton City Council to look again at the potential for a water fluoridation scheme

Southampton City Council has been urged to look again at the potential impact that introducing a water fluoridation scheme could have on reducing tooth decay among local children.

This follows an announcement by Public Health England (PHE) that, because of a lack of support from Southampton City Council, it feels unable to proceed with the scheme that was consulted on by the former South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) in 2008.

PHE continues to endorse the safety and efficacy of water fluoridation and regrets having to drop the scheme, which would serve around 160,000 Southampton residents and 35,000 people living in neighbouring parts of Hampshire. It says fluoridation could make a big difference to tooth decay levels in the city.

Commented British Fluoridation Society chair Ros Hamburger: "This is a sad day for Southampton. If the scheme had gone ahead, reductions of tooth decay of around 30 to 40% could have been expected within five or six years."

She added: "The City Council should reconsider its policy and, in particular, the contribution that water fluoridation could make in protecting local children. I hope this will lead the Council to launch its own public consultation on fresh proposals for a scheme."



**Ros Hamburger, chair,
British Fluoridation Society**

"This is a sad day for Southampton. If the scheme had gone ahead, reductions of tooth decay of around 30 to 40% could have been expected within five or six years.

"The City Council should reconsider its policy and, in particular, the contribution that water fluoridation could make in protecting local children. I hope this will lead the Council to launch its own public consultation on fresh proposals for a scheme."

During the original consultation six years ago, Southampton City Council (representing 82% of the people affected) supported the scheme proposed by South Central SHA. But before the scheme could be implemented, the Council changed its position under pressure from opponents.

The SHA went out of existence in 2013. Under new legislation, local authorities are now responsible for making decisions on fluoridation and Public Health England for implementing them.

Whilst PHE believes it had the legal powers to proceed with the scheme it inherited, it decided not to go ahead without the City Council's support. Only the City Council can change that by reversing its current opposition.



Non-fluoridated Southampton compares unfavourably for children's dental health with many fluoridated local authorities in the West Midlands. For example:

- **5-year olds in fluoridated Dudley (the nearest match in terms of social deprivation) have 46% fewer decayed, missing and filled teeth than those in Southampton.**
- **12-year olds in fluoridated Dudley have 42% fewer decayed, missing and filled teeth than those in Southampton.**
- **3-year olds in fluoridated Dudley have 55% fewer decayed, missing and filled teeth than those in Southampton.**