

# Access to fluoridated drinking water

This report presents estimates of the population with access to fluoridated drinking water in Aotearoa New Zealand, based on data provided to EHINZ by the Water Services Authority | Taumata Arowai.

## Key facts

- According to data held by the Water Services Authority, 58.1% of the New Zealanders on registered drinking water supplies (about 2.6 million people) had access to fluoridated water as of September 2025.
- After adjusting for recent fluoridation changes not yet reported by the Water Services Authority, this total may be up to 66.7%, or around 3.0 million people.
- About 16.6% of the South Island population on registered supplies have access to fluoridated drinking water (21.2% after adjusting for recent fluoridation changes). This compares with 72.1% of the North Island population (81.8% after adjustment). The low figures in the South Island are due to large population centres (such as Christchurch and Queenstown) remaining unfluoridated.

## Water fluoridation is an effective counter to tooth decay

Tooth decay (dental caries) is a major chronic disease among New Zealanders of all ages. It is often accompanied by pain, infection, and tooth loss, and can result in absence from work or school while the condition is treated. Decay is caused by acids secreted by bacteria in the mouth. The acids dissolve the hard enamel of the tooth surface and trigger dental decay. A high-sugar diet can raise the number of bacteria, which in turn increases the production of decay-causing acids (Ministry of Health 2010, OPMCSA 2021). Fluoride is known to protect teeth against dental caries, so adding fluoride to drinking water supplies can help limit tooth decay. Fluoride works to protect teeth in three ways (OPMCSA 2021):

- strengthening of tooth enamel, making teeth more resistant to decay
- interference with the growth of bacteria that cause cavities
- repair of the early stages of tooth decay.

Since July 2022, several local authorities have been directed to add fluoride to one or more of their drinking water supplies, using new powers granted to the Director-General of Health by an amendment to the Health Act in 2021.

## Performance against directives to fluoridate is not captured by the regulator in a timely manner, complicating monitoring efforts

Table 1 reports the progress of supplies directed to fluoridate, according to two sources. First, the [Ministry of Health website](#) and second, the extract from the Water Service Authority's ('the Authority') dataset used to inform this report.

Excluding the discrepancy for Hastings, there is conflict between the Authority and Ministry data in 10 of the 19 supplies, plus one whose status is unclear, as it was not included in the data supplied by the Authority

and cannot be located in other sources.

Updates to fluoridation status will not be reflected in the Authority's records until the supplier notifies the regulator of the change and that change is processed into the registry. Table 1 demonstrates that this process is slow, with some changes still not captured almost a year later.

For this reason, we anticipate that figures derived from Authority data will underestimate the true numbers of people provided with fluoride in their drinking water.

To counter this, we have adjusted the Authority's data for 2024 and 2025, to account for recent fluoridation status as reported by the Ministry of Health. We have determined that all supplies where the sources are in conflict (grey rows in Table 1) are likely to be fluoridated, based on statements published by the councils operating each supply. In the interest of transparency, we present both unadjusted and adjusted figures throughout this report.

**Table 1: Status of supplies instructed to fluoridate, comparison of sources (conflicts highlighted)**

Supply name	Territorial Authority	Population served	Required compliance date	Fluoridated? (Ministry of Health and local councils)	Fluoridated? (Water Services Authority)
Kaitaia	Far North District	5,400	31/7/26	No	No
Kerikeri	Far North District	6,700	31/7/26	No	No
Whangarei	Whangarei District	56,530	28/3/25	Yes	No
Bream Bay	Whangarei District	14,800	28/3/25	Yes	No
Onehunga*	Auckland	25,507	30/6/24	Yes	Yes
Waiuku	Auckland	8,697	30/6/26	No	No
Cambridge	Waipā District	20,833	31/7/23	No	No
Tauranga	Tauranga City	146,097	30/11/24	Yes	No
Kawerau	Western Bay of Plenty District	7,721	30/9/24	Yes	No
Athenree	Western Bay of Plenty District	5,303	31/1/26	Yes	No
Wharawhara**	Western Bay of Plenty District	Approx 5,700	31/1/26	Yes	Unknown
Rotorua Central	Rotorua District	44,000	28/3/25	Yes	No
Rotorua East	Rotorua District	13,000	28/3/25	Yes	No
New Plymouth	New Plymouth District	66,562	31/7/23	Yes	Yes
Hastings Urban	Hastings District	64,764	30/6/23	Yes (partially)	Yes (entirely)
Levin	Horowhenua District	22,000	30/12/24	Yes	No
Dannevirke	Tararua District	6,000	30/9/24	Yes	No
Nelson	Nelson City	52,400	31/12/24	Yes	No
Oamaru	Waitaki District	15,561	30/6/24	Yes	Yes

Notes: \* Onehunga is considered a distribution zone within the Auckland supply, thus doesn't exist in the Authority data as an independent entity.

\*\* Wharawhara does not exist in the Authority's data as an independent supply or subsidiary zone of a larger supply; its population estimate is taken from the Ministry data. 'Required compliance date' refers to the date by which the supply was required to have become fluoridated, not when fluoridation began.

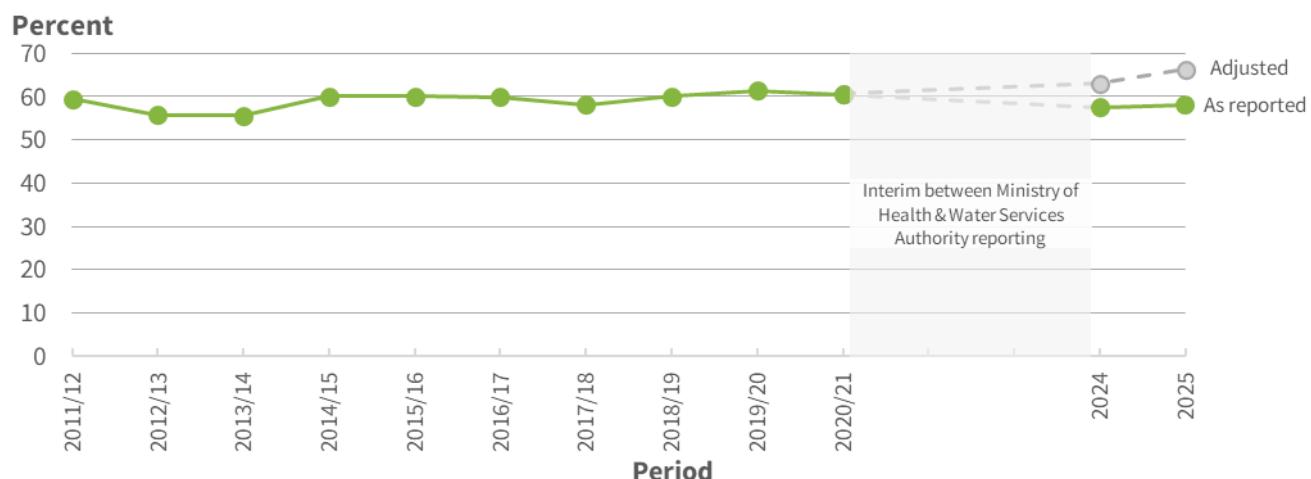
Source: Population figures: Water Services Authority, September 2025. Directives & compliance dates: Ministry of Health, November 2025

## Around two-thirds of New Zealanders on registered supplies may have access to fluoridated drinking water

As of September 2025, around 4.5 million New Zealanders (84% of the population) were served water from supplies registered with the Water Services Authority. The remainder were served from unregistered supplies, which typically serve fewer than 100 people, or get their own water from 'self-supplies' (eg, rainwater tanks).

Of the population on registered supplies, 58.1% (2.6 million) had access to fluoridated drinking water, according to data from the Water Services Authority. However, correcting this figure to account for supplies that fulfilled their directives to fluoridate (though not yet recorded as such by the Authority) increases this total to 3.0 million people, or 66.7% of people on registered supplies.

**Figure 1:** Percentage of the population on registered supplies with access to fluoridated drinking water, by year, 2011/12 to 2025



Notes: Adjusted figures include populations with fluoridated water as reported by Ministry of Health and local councils, despite the supply not yet being reported as fluoridated by the Water Services Authority. The change in the agency responsible for collecting this data resulted in a change in the period associated with the data points. Data reported by the Ministry of Health refers to a July-June annual reporting period. Data from 2024 onward is a snapshot of the registry data at the time it was received by EHINZ from the Authority.

Source: Ministry of Health, Water Services Authority, local authority publications

**Table 2:** Population on registered and fluoridated drinking water supplies, by year, 2011/12 to 2025

(counts in millions)	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2024	2025
Registered supply population	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.5
Population served fluoridated water	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.5 (2.7)	2.6 (3.0)
Proportion served fluoridated water	59.5%	55.7%	55.6%	60.0%	60.0%	59.9%	58.1%	60.0%	61.4%	60.6%	57.5% (63.0%)	58.1% (66.7%)

Notes: *Italic text* indicates adjusted data, which include populations with fluoridated water as reported by Ministry of Health and local councils, despite the supply not yet being reported as fluoridated by the Water Services Authority. The change in the agency responsible for collecting this data resulted in a change in the period associated with the data points. Data reported by the Ministry of Health refers to a July-June annual reporting period. Data from 2024 onward is a snapshot of the registry data at the time it was received by EHINZ from the Authority.

Source: Ministry of Health, Water Services Authority, local authority publications

## Access to fluoridated drinking water is much lower in the South Island

As reported by the Authority, in the South Island, only 16.6% of the population on registered supplies received fluoridated drinking water in 2025. After adjustment for the single fluoridation directive enacted there, this figure rises to 21.2%. This translates to 191,400 people receiving fluoridated water in the South Island (243,370 people after adjustment).

In comparison, 72.1% of the registered supply population in the North Island (or 81.8% after adjustment) received fluoridated drinking water. This represents about 2,424,800 people receiving fluoridated water in the North Island (2,745,940 people after adjustment).

Many highly populated areas in the South Island remain unfluoridated. For instance, Christchurch City is one of the few major cities in the country without fluoridation of its water supply. If this were to happen, the number of people in the South Island with access to fluoridated drinking water would almost triple.

**Table 3: Population served with fluoridated water, by Territorial Authority, as at September 2025**

Territorial Authority	People on registered supplies (as at September 2025)	People served fluoridated water (unadjusted / adjusted)	Percent served fluoridated water (unadjusted / adjusted)
Far North District	31,198	-	-
Whangārei District	75,659	- / 71,330	- / 94.3%
Kaipara District	7,713	-	-
Auckland	1,509,004	1,373,739	91.0%
Thames-Coromandel District	26,707	7,883	29.5%
Hauraki District	19,907	-	-
Waikato District	41,171	21,500	52.2%
Matamata-Piako District	28,447	6,309	22.2%
Hamilton City	185,340	185,315	100%
Waipā District	43,122	-	-
Ōtorohanga District	6,005	-	-
South Waikato District	19,009	13,300	70%
Waitomo District	6,222	-	-
Taupō District	46,975	35,251	75.0%
Western Bay of Plenty District	39,408	- / 18,724	- / 47.5%
Tauranga City	146,627	- / 146,097	- / 99.6%
Rotorua District	69,587	- / 57,000	- / 81.9%
Whakatāne District	31,641	21,020	66.4%
Kawerau District	7,721	-	-
Ōpōtiki District	5,835	-	-
Gisborne District	43,354	39,300	90.6%
Wairoa District	5,299	-	-
Hastings District	72,952	64,764	88.8%
Napier City	59,055	-	-
Central Hawke's Bay District	7,664	-	-
New Plymouth District	74,875	66,562	88.9%
Stratford District	7,347	6,773	92.2%
South Taranaki District	21,306	12,639	59.3%
Ruapehu District	20,198	-	-
Whanganui District	36,738	-	-
Rangitīkei District	9,123	-	-
Manawatū District	23,428	18,450	78.8%
Palmerston North City	89,831	79,427	88.4%
Tararua District	11,691	- / 6,000	- / 51.3%
Horowhenua District	29,076	- / 22,000	- / 75.7%
Kāpiti Coast District	52,815	43,120	81.6%
Porirua City	54,994	54,830	99.7%
Upper Hutt City	41,037	39,927	97.3%
Hutt City	104,092	104,047	100%
Wellington City	210,637	210,637	100%
Masterton District	22,703	20,000	88.1%
Carterton District	6,106	-	-
South Wairarapa District	7,260	-	-
Tasman District	39,136	-	-
Nelson City	52,701	- / 52,400	- / 99.4%
Marlborough District	42,982	1,500	3.5%
Kaikoura District	3,726	-	-
Buller District	7,180	-	-
Grey District	10,854	-	-
Westland District	8,247	-	-
Hurunui District	15,243	-	-
Waimakariri District	83,581	-	-
Christchurch City	377,287	-	-

Selwyn District	79,200	1,700	2.1%
Ashburton District	25,172	1,878	7.5%
Timaru District	43,748	-	-
Mackenzie District	5,195	-	-
Waimate District	6,757	-	-
Chatham Islands	321	-	-
Waitaki District	20,080	15,561	77.5%
Central Otago District	19,465	-	-
Queenstown Lakes District	100,299	-	-
Dunedin City	115,602	112,515	97.3%
Clutha District	15,642	7,761	49.6%
Southland District	13,356	-	-
Gore District	9,690	-	-
Invercargill City	50,973	50,456	99.0%
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>4,505,316</b>	<b>2,616,164 / 2,989,715</b>	<b>58.1% / 66.7%</b>

Note: *Italic* text indicates adjusted data, which include populations with fluoridated water as reported by Ministry of Health and local councils, despite the supply not yet being reported as fluoridated by the Water Services Authority.

Source: Population figures & fluoridation status: Water Services Authority, September 2025 and local authority publications (adjusted figures). Directives: Ministry of Health 2025

## Data for this indicator

This indicator analyses data provided to EHINZ by the Water Services Authority | Taumata Arowai at our request. The fluoridation status of supplies is not included in the datasets that the Authority makes public, and was extracted from their list of verified drinking water supplies in September 2025. Historical figures sourced from the Ministry of Health's now-disestablished Annual Reports on drinking water are also presented to provide context for trends over time.

The population figures used in this report are based on the listed populations for the individual distribution zones that comprise registered drinking water supplies, regardless of supplier type. These figures are calculated from zones listed as fluoridated in the Authority's records and do not account for errors in the process of adding fluoride to water supplies that may result in fewer people having access to fluoridated drinking water than the stated number. This approach prevents non-fluoridated subsets of larger fluoridated supplies (which may be so in accordance with specific local agreements) from being counted towards the 'fluoridated' population, preventing overestimation.

For additional information, see the [Metadata](#) sheet.

## References

Ministry of Health. 2010. *Our Oral Health: Key findings of the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. *Annual Reports on Drinking-water Quality (2011 to 2022)*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. 2025. *Implementation of community water fluoridation*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

URL: <https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/programmes-and-initiatives/oral-health/implementation-of-community-water-fluoridation> (accessed 24 November 2025, last updated 20 November 2025)

Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (OPMSCA). 2021. *Fluoridation: an update on evidence*. Wellington: Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor.

Water Services Authority | Taumata Arowai. 2025, 20 September. *Extract from the public register of drinking water supplies*. Wellington: Taumata Arowai (Personal communication with Taumata Arowai analysts)

Additionally, the websites of all local authorities that received directives to fluoridate were searched between 15 and 17 December 2025 to verify the fluoridation of certain supplies. For a full list of these websites and URLs, see the metadata section discussing the process for adjusting the Authority data.

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