

**OFFICIAL HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY RESPONSE TO  
Petition to prohibit all federal agencies from promoting, endorsing, or funding fluoridation of the public  
drinking water.**

## **Protecting Our Drinking Water and Health**

**By Dr. Howard K. Koh and Nancy Stoner**

Thank you for your petition regarding the fluoridation of public drinking water. The Obama Administration is committed to protecting the health of all Americans. Ensuring that Americans have access to clean, safe public drinking water is essential to good health, which is why this Administration has made it a priority to make sure standards and guidelines for drinking water serve the best interest of the American people.

Starting in the 1940s, communities across the United States began engaging in a public health effort aimed at reducing tooth decay. Those communities found that raising the concentration of fluoride in public water (it almost always occurs naturally at low levels) significantly improved their residents' oral health. This practice has grown steadily and today nearly 70% of Americans live on public water systems that provide fluoridated water. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named the fluoridation of drinking water one of ten great public health achievements of the 20th Century. For many years, panels of experts from different health and scientific fields have provided strong evidence that water [fluoridation is safe and effective](#). The Administration recognizes the importance of fluoridation and its effectiveness in preventing tooth decay.

The Administration also recognizes that Americans today have access to more sources of fluoride – such as toothpaste and mouthwash – than they did when fluoridation was first introduced. The increase in additional sources of fluoride has been accompanied by an overall increase in dental fluorosis. Dental fluorosis in the United States appears mostly in the very mild or mild form – as barely visible lacy white markings or spots on the enamel. The severe form of dental fluorosis, with staining and pitting of the tooth surface, is rare in the United States.

The Administration has taken actions to maximize the health benefits of water fluoridation, while limiting dental fluorosis. In January 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced important science-based actions on water fluoridation. HHS proposed that the recommended level of fluoride in drinking water be set at 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water. This [new guidance](#) would update and replace the current recommended range of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams. Additionally, in this same announcement, EPA agreed to initiate a review of the maximum amount of fluoride allowed in drinking water.

Our work to update community water fluoridation practices continues today. HHS is currently reviewing comments received from the public and stakeholders on the [proposed recommendation](#). The comment period ended on April 15, 2011. HHS is expecting to issue final guidance in the coming months. Moreover, EPA is reviewing the maximum amount of fluoride allowed in drinking water, and upon completion [of its review](#), will determine whether it is appropriate to revise the drinking water standard. [More information on this review is available on the EPA website](#).

The Administration is committed to ensuring that all Americans live in a healthy, safe environment. As we work to achieve this goal, we appreciate the public's engagement and look forward to continuing to work together to ensure all Americans have clean, safe water.

For more information about community water fluoridation, as well as information on how to prevent tooth decay and reduce the chance of children developing dental fluorosis, please visit the [CDC website](#).

***Dr. Howard K. Koh, MD, MPH is Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services. Nancy Stoner is Acting Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water at the Environmental Protection Agency.***