

DENTAL BOOTCAMP

FactSheet

► Fluoride strengthens teeth

Fluoride is a natural mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and protects against decay.

In Australia, most capital cities have optimal amounts of fluoride added to tap water. Some areas of the country have naturally occurring fluoride in the water, and in those places extra fluoride is not added. It is important to note that bottled water usually does not contain enough fluoride to offer protection against tooth decay. Some home water filters also remove fluoride from tap water.

If you live in an area that doesn't have any fluoride in the water, especially where only rainwater or tank water is available, then it is important to speak with your dentist about other fluoride options to maintain the health of your child's teeth. Your dentist may recommend fluoride tablets or they may apply topical fluoride to your child's teeth, which has been proven to help prevent tooth decay.

Always use toothpaste with a fluoride content that is appropriate for a child – there are low fluoride toothpastes available specifically for children. Too much fluoride during tooth development can cause mild white flocking or mottling of permanent teeth ("enamel fluorosis"). A young child who regularly swallows adult-strength fluoride toothpaste instead of spitting it out may develop enamel fluorosis.

To prevent dental fluorosis:

- Choose a low-fluoride toothpaste for children younger than six years
- Apply a pea-sized amount to the toothbrush and smear it into the bristles
- Encourage your child to spit out the toothpaste after brushing
- Store all toothpastes out of your child's reach. Some small children love the taste of toothpaste and will eat it if given the chance
- If your child's permanent teeth have erupted mottled, your dentist can suggest treatment to improve their appearance

