



On Jan. 7, 2011, after a six-year campaign by Environmental Working Group and other public health advocates, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed that water utilities sharply reduce the amount of fluoride added to community drinking water.

The department [cited scientific research](#) on health risks associated with excess fluoride, among them dental fluorosis (mottling and pitting of tooth enamel), bone fractures and [skeletal fluorosis](#), a painful and sometimes crippling condition. Federal officials also acknowledged that, [as EWG and its allied have long argued](#), millions of children are being overexposed to fluoride. According to a [fact sheet posted on the Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) website](#), new data assessing population-wide exposure to fluoride showed it was “likely that some children are exposed to too much fluoride at least occasionally.”

Some independent studies point to a possible link between fluoride exposure and osteosarcoma (bone cancer), neurotoxicity and disruption of thyroid function.

[Fluoride in tap water](#) -

[What you can do](#)

The HHS plan, announced January 7, 2011, and slated to become final sometime in the spring, would advise local water utilities to reduce the amount of fluoride in tap water to 0.7 milligrams per liter of water, down from the current, strictly voluntary HHS guidance -- 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams per liter. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency imposes a legally-binding cap on fluoride in tap water of 4 milligrams per liter - nearly six times the upper limit favored by HHS.

[According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), nearly 200 million Americans - more than 72 percent of the population - drink fluoridated water.

The Environmental Working Group supports the use of fluoride in toothpaste, where there is strong evidence of its effectiveness. But EWG’s analysis concludes that fluoridation of public water supplies should end, because the risks outweigh possible benefits, especially for infants and young children, because they consume more water than adults relative to their size.

In June 2005, [EWG discovered that a Harvard professor conducting a fluoridation safety study had ignored research](#) by Dr. Elise B. Bassin that had suggested that boys who drank fluoridated water were five times more likely to develop osteosarcoma than those who drank unfluoridated water. Dr. Chester Douglass of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine - Bassin’s doctoral adviser - omitted her striking results from his final report while conducting research on fluoride exposure and osteosarcoma on grants from the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences. Douglass’s claim that no relationship between fluoride and cancer had been observed, coupled with his

financial relationship with fluoride toothpaste manufacturer Colgate-Palmolive, led EWG to file ethics complaints with NIEHS and Harvard. A Harvard ethics panel cleared Douglass; [EWG and the Fluoride Action Network reported](#) that he subsequently made a donation of \$1 million to the Harvard dental school.

Also in 2005, EWG and two other health advocacy organizations, the Fluoride Action Network and Beyond Pesticides, filed a petition challenging the EPA's [new maximum legal limits for fluoride in food](#). EPA had raised the limits for various foods at the request of Dow AgroSciences, which was aiming to sell sulfuryl fluoride as a post-harvest fumigant for food processing and storage facilities. EWG and its allies protested that EPA's new legal limits for fluoride were too high: for instance, they permitted 900 parts per million of fluoride in powdered eggs, perilously close to the level considered toxic by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Since one-third of the nation's egg crop is powdered, many people, especially children, could quickly become overexposed to fluoride via their daily intake of food and water.

An [EWG analysis of National Academy of Sciences data, released in March 2006](#), found that in 25 of the 28 largest U.S. cities, fluoride concentrations in tap water alone would put 8-to-36 percent of all babies up to 6 months of age over the safe dose of fluoride on any given day.

In 2007, the Municipal Water District of Los Angeles considered increasing the levels of fluoride in its drinking water. [EWG objected](#), and the utility reversed itself.

In February 2008, [EWG asked the Federal Trade Commission to stop Nursery Water](#), one of the nation's biggest sellers of bottled water for infants, from advertising that its fluoridated water is safe for babies, in violation of FDA rules and American Academy of Pediatrics guidance.