

# TENNESSEE: LAWMAKER CAMPAIGNS AGAINST FLUORIDE BILL

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Location: [United States](#), [Tennessee](#)

Tennessee Rep. Joey Hensley, R-Hohenwald, wants all water systems in Tennessee to stop adding **fluoride** to water.

“It has too many side effects, and the benefits are not there to warrant giving mass drugs to the population whether they need it or not,” said Rep. Hensley, who also is a family practice physician.

A national debate about fluoride in water began spilling into Tennessee when Rep. Hensley sent a letter in 2006 to every water utility in the state, telling them there is no state requirement to add the chemical to water and he didn’t think they should.

“There were a few that used my letter to stop,” he said. “It’s not state law, and it’s not required.”

Since Jan. 1, 2006, 31 state utilities have dropped fluoride, according to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. The agency writes fluoride guidelines into water treatment permits for utilities that choose to use **fluoridation**.

TDEC spokeswoman Tisha Calabrese-Benton said 296 of the state’s 490 community water systems are fluoridated. She said systems must monitor their treated water to measure the amount of fluoride.

Many of the systems that dropped fluoridation did so because of “problems with fluoride chemical availability, quality control issues with imported fluoride powder ... and the escalating cost of liquid fluoride chemical,” she said.

Fluoride — a byproduct of fertilizer manufacture — has been added to water systems all over the nation for about 40 years to prevent tooth decay. It has been hailed by the Centers for Disease Control as one of the greatest breakthroughs in public health.

But two years ago, fluoride’s major supporter, the American Dental Association, and the National Academy of Sciences both issued warnings that baby formula shouldn’t be made with tap water to ensure infants don’t get too much fluoride.

Fluoride accumulates and can harm developing teeth, according to research reports. It also has been linked to kidney and thyroid disorders in adults.

However, ADA and CDC Web sites continue to tout the benefits of fluoride in water for the general population.

Many states, including Georgia, require the additive unless utility systems or municipalities offer a referendum so citizens may vote to have it dropped from water treatment.

Rep. Hensley said the confusion over whether fluoride in water is good or bad is understandable. When the practice began decades ago, little was known about the side effects of ingesting a chemical that, as a paste on teeth, is protective.

Now, after years of defending the practice as good for people, governments have a hard time backing down, he said.

“It’s face saving,” he said of some utilities’ and municipalities’ reluctance to let go of the practice. “They would have to then say, ‘All these years we were saying it was good for you — we were wrong about that.’”

#### **FLUORIDE RISKS**

- \* Fluorosis: Causes tooth enamel to spot, pit and stain in children 8 and younger who consume excess fluoride during critical periods of tooth development.

- \* Potential damage to bones, brain and thyroid gland.

- \* Additional risks to infants and high water drinkers, as well those with thyroid or kidney disorders, diabetics.

Source: American Dental Association, a 2006 National Research Council fluoride report.

#### **DROPPING FLUORIDATION**

Southeast Tennessee systems dropping fluoride:

- \* Big Creek Utility District, Grundy County

- \* Cagle-Fredonia Utility District: Sequatchie County

- \* Griffith Creek Utility District, Marion County

- \* Savannah Valley Utility District, Hamilton County

- \* Taft Youth Center, Bledsoe County

Source: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation