

Water System Fluoridation Implementation Study

Frequently Asked Questions



Overview

The City of Spokane operates the third largest water system in the state of Washington. The Water Department's priority is to deliver safe, high-quality drinking water to its residents with efficient operations, while keeping rates affordable for our community. To inform future decisions, the City is completing a feasibility study to better understand the costs and implementation steps associated with providing fluoridated water to the community. The study will take about a year and a half to complete and is fully paid for with grant funds. City of Spokane's elected leaders are committed to a full and transparent public process throughout, including a public engagement period once the study is complete.

How does the City currently treat its drinking water?

Spokane relies on high-quality water from the Spokane Valley Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer to provide more than 230,000 community members with clean, safe drinking water every day. After the water is pumped from the City's eight well stations, it is disinfected with chlorine to make sure the quality is maintained all the way to customers' taps. More information is available on the Spokane Water Department's [webpage](#).

What is the current status of fluoride in our water?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral released from rocks into the soil, water, and air. Almost all water contains some fluoride. Spokane's aquifer currently has small amounts of naturally occurring fluoride (less than 0.1 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water). These amounts are lower than the community water fluoridation levels recommended to prevent tooth decay.

Why is there a study being done now?

The City is completing the feasibility study at this time, using recently available funding. In September 2020, the Spokane City Council accepted funds from the Arcora Foundation with the intent of implementing fluoridation. After further consideration, Spokane's elected officials identified the need for an initial feasibility study to understand the costs to implement fluoridation within the City's existing water infrastructure and are using grant funds now for this purpose. This information will be used by Spokane's elected officials to help determine next steps.

What is the goal of this feasibility study?

The goal of the feasibility study is to provide facts and analysis to inform future decisions about the City's drinking water. This includes evaluating design options for adding fluoride to the existing water system and analyzing the associated costs.

For more information visit the [Fluoride System Study](#) webpage.
Questions or comments? Email: fluoridesystemstudy@spokanecity.org

What will the study include?

The feasibility study includes three phases of engineering analysis to:

- Collect data and analyze alternatives:
 - Assess the current condition of the City's well stations and identify what, if any, upgrades are needed to incorporate fluoridation into water delivery operations.
 - Develop criteria for the proposed fluoridation implementation alternatives.
 - Review different types of fluoridation systems and develop feasible design alternatives for retrofitting existing well stations and installing a fluoridation delivery system.
- Evaluate alternatives and select preferred alternative:
 - Conduct an environmental review and evaluate regulatory requirements to integrate with existing facilities, provide for worker safety, protect the environment, and maintain reliable system operations and maintenance.
 - Identify a preferred option based on the City's long-term goals of balancing sustainability, social responsibility, and affordability.
- Prepare conceptual design of selected alternative:
 - Determine lifecycle costs for each design alternative, including costs to build and operate a new fluoridation delivery system.

Will the study assess potential environmental impacts, particularly impacts to the river and downstream uses?

During the study, the City will complete a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) evaluation to identify potential impacts to the built or natural environment from fluoridating the City's drinking water. The addition of fluoride at the low concentrations used in municipal drinking water is unlikely to change the downstream water quality.

Will the study consider impacts to home and building plumbing?

The study will evaluate how each design alternative performs within established water quality parameters, including potential changes to corrosivity of water. Given the very small amounts of chemical addition recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service (about 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of drinking water), no impacts to private plumbing or other infrastructure are anticipated.

When will the study be complete?

The study is expected to be complete in summer 2023 and will include information on the feasibility, costs, and potential impacts of moving to fluoridated drinking water.

How will the City use feedback from the community?

Spokane's elected officials are committed to a full review of the details of this study, including public engagement prior to determining next steps about how to move forward. The Spokane City Council approved moving forward with the study in Resolution 2022-0016, which included a commitment to a

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transparent public process and additional public engagement after receiving the results of the study. The Mayor and some individual Council members have advocated for a vote of Spokane citizens to help inform on the next steps.

How common is community water fluoridation? Are there national standards?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Community Water Fluoridation webpage](#), in 2018, 73 percent of the U.S. population on community water systems had access to fluoridated water through naturally occurring fluoride or added fluoride treatment. The Washington Department of Health's [Fluoridation of Drinking Water webpage](#) provides information about public water systems in the state with levels of naturally occurring fluoride or added fluoride treatment considered significant for dental health. The U.S. Public Health Service recommends 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of drinking water.

Would fluoride change the taste of the water?

Fluoride has no taste, color, or odor at concentrations added or naturally occurring in drinking water.

How can I stay informed?

The City is providing updates and information through the project [webpage](#). If you have questions regarding the study, please email fluoridesystemstudy@spokanecity.org.