

3 November 1997

## MPs' VIEWS ON WATER FLUORIDATION: SURVEY SHOWS 70% SUPPORT

Since the general election the British Dental Association has updated its survey of MPs' opinions on water fluoridation to incorporate the views of new MPs.

The results show 70% of MPs support adjusting the level of fluoride in water supplies to reduce tooth decay.

There is majority support in the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat parliamentary parties.

### **1. PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING EXISTING LEGISLATION**

These results are significant because, since Parliament voted for the Water (Fluoridation) Act in 1985, no new fluoridation schemes have been introduced other than those schemes in the West Midlands for which legal agreements existed between health authorities and water suppliers prior to the Act. The lack of progress is because water suppliers are interpreting the legislation to mean that they have discretion to refuse health authorities' requests for fluoridation.

### **2. NEED FOR ACTION TO MAKE THE LEGISLATION WORK**

Health authorities and the British Dental Association believe that water suppliers are misinterpreting the Act and frustrating Parliament's original intention. Since water fluoridation is the single most effective public health measure available to health authorities to reduce dental caries on a community-wide scale, urgent action is needed to make it clear that water suppliers **must** fluoridate water supplies when requested to do so by health authorities.

The British Dental Association welcomes the Government's recent commitment to act to ensure that water companies are no longer able to block health authorities' fluoridation proposals. Such action might entail an amendment to the wording of the Act. The results of our survey of MPs suggest that a majority of MPs would support the Government on this issue.

## **SUMMARY OF BDA SURVEY RESULTS**

opinions on water fluoridation to incorporate the views of new MPs. A total of 237 MPs had responded by 1 October 1997. To their responses can be added information derived from last year's survey, and from letters and statements by MPs. This brings the total to 434 (66% of all MPs).

### **Views on fluoridation across all political parties**

Analysis of the views of these 434 MPs across all political parties shows that:

- **70% are in favour of water fluoridation**
- 20% are against it
- 4% say they have not made up their mind
- 5% declined to participate in the survey.

### **Views on fluoridation among Labour MPs**

Analysis of the views of 265 Labour MPs shows that:

- **77% are in favour of water fluoridation**
- 15% are against it
- 4% say they have not made up their mind
- 3% declined to participate in the survey.

### **Views on fluoridation among Conservative MPs**

Analysis of the views of 113 Conservative MPs shows that:

- **62% are in favour of water fluoridation**
- 23% are against it
- 4% say they have not made up their mind
- 10% declined to participate in the survey.

### **Views on fluoridation among Liberal Democrat MPs**

Analysis of the views of 34 Liberal Democrat MPs shows that:

- **65% are in favour of water fluoridation**
- 23% are against it
- 12% say they have not made up their mind
- none declined to participate in the survey.