

# Fluoride opponents continue the fight

OPPONENTS of fluoride are trying to force the Ministry of Health to treat it as a medicine and regulate the amount added to tap water, the High Court at Wellington has been told.

But even should they succeed, the ministry plans to exempt immediately fluoridated public water supplies from the Medicines Act.

Lisa Hansen, for anti-fluoride group New Health New Zealand, told the court yesterday it was absurd that fluoride tablets were deemed a medicine under the act but fluoride added to tap water was not.

In March, New Health failed in another High Court case to stop South Taranaki District Council adding fluoride to the water supply in Patea and Waverley. It appealed against the decision.

Yesterday's judicial review was a result of that decision, in which Justice Rodney Hansen said water fluoridation had a therapeutic medical purpose in preventing tooth decay and a known pharmacological effect by mineralisation of tooth enamel.

Lisa Hansen said his findings meant fluoride added to tap water should be deemed a medicine and that required the ministry to ensure its manufacture, distribution, sale and supply complied with the act.

A bottle of 0.5mg fluoride tablets was deemed a medicine under the act and two tablets, or 1mg, was the recommended adult dose, which equalled a concentration of one part per million (ppm) if put into a litre of water.

Public water supplies were allowed to have a concentration of 0.7 to 1ppm of fluoride added, which meant a litre contained the same fluoride dose as two 0.5mg tablets of fluoride, she said.

"I submit it is absurd 0.5mg is considered to be a medicine in pill form, but the same amount delivered through the water supply isn't."

Justice David Collins said the issue of dose troubled him most about the case.

"Is the dosage set out in the regulations the dosage I get when I drink a litre of [fluoridated] water?"

Crown lawyer Jane Foster, appearing for the attorney-general on behalf of the minister of health, conceded that a litre of tap water fluoridated at 1ppm delivered the same dose as dissolving 1mg of fluoride tablets in a litre of water.

Everyone ingested it when drinking fluoridated tap water, despite recommendations on fluoride tablet bottles to avoid giving it to babies and pregnant women. Collins reserved his decision.