

## Teething problems in Qld over fluoride levels

SHANE MCLEOD: Queensland may have been the last state or territory to add fluoride to water supplies but authorities there still don't seem to be able to get it right.

It has been revealed that fluoridated water in the state's South-East is in breach of health regulations with concentrations of the chemical wrong in a number of treatment plants.

In Brisbane, Nicole Butler reports.

NICOLE BUTLER: Fluoridating water supplies has long been a controversial issue in Queensland.

But after the state recorded the worst dental health in the nation, the Bligh Government pressed ahead and began rolling out fluoride around a year ago.

Four months down the track an overdose was released into Brisbane's water supplies and people became sick.

Eight months later and it seems SEQ Water is still struggling to get the concentration of the chemical right. The latest report shows under dosing at one of five treatment plants in the September quarter. And it's been reported three other sites across Brisbane and the Gold Coast were under dosed in the June quarter last year.

SEQ Water spokesman Mike Foster denies the system is unreliable.

MIKE FOSTER: We've consistently said as an organisation it's going to take six to 12 months to bed down these fluoride dosing plants. Typically of any new chemical dosing plant whether it's water treatment plant or a fluoride plant. But probably more importantly that all plants over each of the quarters of this year including the first quarter, each of the plants consistently delivered at that 0.4 milligrams a litre which was deemed by Queensland health to be the sort of cut off point where you start to get a health benefit.

NICOLE BUTLER: Mr Foster insists the dosage problems should be eliminated early this year.

But he concedes authorities will be concerned if the system in South-East Queensland isn't working properly by March.

MIKE FOSTER: If we're not tracking between that 0.7 and 0.9 milligrams as a regulated concentration rate, if we're not hitting that on all five of our stage one plants in the first quarter that'd be a concern and there'd have to be some pretty good reasons why we weren't hitting that.

NICOLE BUTLER: The Acting Premier Paul Lucas is playing down the system's teething problems.

He says it took Queenslanders 30 years to decide to go ahead with fluoridation and getting it right takes time too.

PAUL LUCAS: I'm happy to take a little bit of time to get the dosing levels right to make sure that we've got appropriate public confidence. The level of fluoride at the water broadly at the moment is doing people good in terms of their teeth. I've got a mouthful of fillings frankly because Queensland didn't have fluoridated water. We want to do it and we want to do it right to ensure that we have public confidence.

NICOLE BUTLER: But Queensland's Opposition says the dismal dosage reports raise questions about government promises the fluoride rollout would be safe and controlled.

Liberal National Party frontbencher Fiona Simpson says so far it's been a series of blunders.

FIONA SIMPSON: This has just been a debacle with fluoride, the Government said they were addressing public health and yet they can't even get the dosage right. They clearly didn't do their homework.

NICOLE BUTLER: Stage two of the fluoride rollout is now underway with the chemical being introduced into regional centres across Queensland.

SHANE MCLEOD: Nicole Butler.

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