Fluoride toothpaste carries a label which says children should use only a pea sized amount. In a separate label box is the statement: “if more than what is used for brushing is accidentally swallowed, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.

A superficial understanding of the label's two fold origin and purpose is the basis of propaganda designed to inappropriately frighten people about community water fluoridation.

The label has two parts. The “Directions” include advise to parents sponsored by the American Dental Association. Age specific amounts of toothpaste are recommended.

An association between brown stained teeth and lack of decay was in reported in 1925. Fluoride was the cause of both. The challenge became choosing a fluoride concentration which balanced fewer cavities with dental fluorosis.
A graph from the 1940’s illustrates how 1 ppm was selected as a balance – preventing decay yet avoiding too much fluorosis.

Because fluoride is now in both public drinking water and oral health products, today’s optimally fluoridated water balanced sweet spot is slightly less at 0.7 ppm.

In the early 90’s dental fluorosis was on the increase. This paper by Pendrys in the Journal of the American Dental Association found toothpaste the prime cause. Toothpaste has about 2000 times more fluoride than fluoridated water. Children whose teeth are still forming must be supervised to use the proper amount of toothpaste to avoid fluorosis.

The American Dental Association, whose seal of approval appears on toothpaste, lobbied the Food and Drug Administration to place the current “Directions” on packaging to assist parents in right sizing children’s toothpaste use.

15 years later Dr. Pendrys published in the Journal of the American Dental Association a follow-up study which proved the “Directions” on the toothpaste label were very effective.

All fluorosis, even that of only cosmetic concern, was avoided and cavities were reduced by 40%.
Another portion of the toothpaste label is a Federal Drug Administration (FDA) required warning that appears on all Over the Counter (OTC) medications.

There are some general warnings required on all OTC drugs, warnings for general classes of OTC drugs, and specific warnings for individual active ingredients. An example of a general warning would be the accidental overdose warning that's required on all orally administered drugs. And that warning reads "in case of accidental overdose, seek professional assistance or contact the poison control center immediately." Again, this is required on all orally ingested drugs. That warning was modified in the case of the anti-caries monograph to read "if you accidentally swallow more than used for" -- and you select brushing or rinsing -- "seek professional assistance or contact the poison control center immediately."

General Overview of OTC labeling.
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www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/98/transct/3425t2.rtf

The message is determined by the FDA regulations and is completely unrelated to drinking water and the ADA sponsored instructions to parents

Note that the same warning appears on oral health products whether or not they contain fluoride.
The instructions designed by the FDA to avoid acute poisonings has no connection whatsoever to the Directions placed by the ADA to decrease fluorosis. The pea sized amount recommended is completely safe. National Poison Control reports show that there have been no childhood deaths from toothpaste in the US.

Drinking water with 0.7 ppm fluoride to prevent cavities is completely safe. Arguing that fluoridated water is toxic because of the toothpaste label is fear based propaganda.

Using a false and misleading interpretation of the tooth paste label seeks to convince civic leaders and average citizens to reject what Surgeon General C. Everett Koop called "the single most important commitment a community can make to its children and to future generations."

Additional reference: ADA Statement on Toothpaste Label