FACULTYPERSPECTIVE

VIEWS ON DENTAL TOPICS & TRENDS

Defending Fluoride in a Changing Environment

Contributed by Dr. Joan Gluch

Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named community water fluoridation as one of the top ten greatest public health achievements of the twentieth century, many federal and state officials have recently challenged the safety of water fluoridation, creating doubt among many community members. Many dentists report that their patients ask questions about the safety and efficacy of all fluoride products, not just water fluoridation, and refuse any fluoride for themselves and their children because of the negative reports in the popular press.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial for dentists and their staff to defend fluoride and answer patients' questions in clear and concise terms emphasizing safety and disease prevention. Studies consistently show that communities with fluoridated water experience fewer cavities than those without it. For example, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) review found that water fluoridation reduces cavity incidence by 25% across all age groups.

Dentists should first listen to their patient's concerns and tailor the message. including personal experiences about the positive benefits of fluoride to build trust. When safety is a concern, dentists should provide information about the rigorous US safety standards because studies that suggest a link between high fluoride exposure and reduced IQ scores were done in other countries that exceed the US-regulated amount of .7 mg fluoride in municipal water. Although these studies are important to identify safety concerns with excessive amounts of fluoride, they do not apply to the conditions of US water fluoridation. Since fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral commonly found in rocky soils, nearly all US water contains some fluoride. When the naturally occurring fluoride levels are not high



enough to reduce dental decay, communities add the right amount of fluoride to reach the desired .7 mg level.

Water fluoridation is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions available. The CDC estimates that every dollar spent on water fluoridation saves approximately \$38 in dental treatment costs. This is because preventing cavities through fluoridation reduces the need for dental treatments, which can be expensive and inaccessible for many people. The cost savings are particularly significant for low-income communities, where access to dental care may be limited. By investing in water fluoridation, communities can reduce healthcare costs and improve the overall health of their residents.

Because some patients equate concerns with water fluoridation with all fluoride products, dentists should highlight the advantages and low-risk profile of topical fluoride treatments. Unfortunately, many patients are eliminating all fluoride products due to "Water fluoridation is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions available. The CDC estimates that every dollar spent on water fluoridation saves approximately \$38 in dental treatment costs. " – DR. JOAN GLUCH

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the negative associations reported regarding water fluoridation. Dentists should ensure that patients understand the role of systemic and topical fluorides as key elements in dental decay prevention.

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Dentists have an essential role in educating their patients regarding the many benefits of water fluoridation and all fluoride products to reduce dental decay and improve oral health. Water fluoridation is a crucial preventive measure for community oral health. It plays a vital role in improving the overall health of communities by preventing dental caries, reducing healthcare costs, and addressing oral health disparities. Community water fluoridation is safe, effective, and cost-efficient, making it an essential component of public health strategies promoting oral health. Dentists should recommend the US website http://www.ilikemyteeth.org, which provides consumer-friendly information that is easily accessible to all for further information.