Community Water Fluoridation: Proven, Safe, and Essential for Oral Health

More than 75 years of research and thousands of studies demonstrate that, at appropriate levels, fluoride is safe for consumption, poses no risk to overall health, and is essential in preventing tooth decay. These findings are supported by leading health organizations, including the American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.[1,2] In the US, one year of community water fluoridation saves $6.5 billion in dental treatment costs. [3] Yet, despite overwhelming evidence, some states and communities are removing fluoride from their water systems, risking widespread negative health and financial consequences.

Water Fluoridation Improves Health and Reduces Health Care Costs

Water fluoridation is a proven, cost-effective way to prevent dental disease and protect community health, especially for those without easy access to dental care.

Fewer Cavities and Less Dental Decay: Fluoridated water reduces tooth decay by strengthening the enamel and root structure of teeth. On average, fluoridated water reduces cavities by 25% in children and adults.[4,5] Dentists and pediatricians recommend children receive fluoride both topically (through toothpaste and varnish) and systemically (through drinking water) to achieve the greatest oral health benefits.[6]

Savings on Dental Costs: Communities that fluoridate see lower dental treatment costs. For example, a recent study found that after Juneau, Alaska stopped fluoridating its water in 2007, dental caries treatment costs for children spiked — and for kids under 6 years old, they more than doubled.[7] Similarly, a decade after discontinuing fluoridation in 2011, Calgary residents voted in 2021 to reinstate it because children's tooth decay rates had jumped so dramatically.[8]

Essential Preventive Care for Millions: For the 1 in 10 children without dental insurance,[9] the nearly 70 million adults who also lack dental benefits,[10] and the millions more who either can't afford care or live far from a dental provider, fluoridated water is often their only source of preventive dental care. Without it, preventable conditions often escalate into emergencies: non-traumatic dental conditions accounted for nearly $3.4 billion in avoidable health care spending in 2019 alone.[11]

Protect Access to Community Water Fluoridation

Protect Water Fluoridation Programs

Policymakers should safeguard existing community water fluoridation programs against misinformation, budget cuts, and regulatory challenges. New policies should also support the establishment of fluoridation systems where none currently exist.

A national survey of US adults shows 81% either support community water fluoridation (52%) or are not opposed to it (29%). [12]

By improving access to community water fluoridation, policymakers can improve overall health, reduce dental disease, and save billions in health care costs.

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