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National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion

Oral Health Resources

Resource Library Fact Sheet

Community Water Fluoridation: Surgeon General's Statement, 2004

Since the 1950s, each U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon General has committed his or her support for community water fluoridation. Below is the most recent endorsement supporting community water fluoridation from Surgeon General, Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.S., VADM, USPHS.

As noted in *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*, community water fluoridation continues to be the most cost-effective, equitable and safe means to provide protection from tooth decay in a community. Scientific studies have found that people living in communities with fluoridated water have fewer cavities than those living where the water is not fluoridated. For more than 50 years, small amounts of fluoride have been added to drinking water supplies in the United States where naturally-occurring fluoride levels are too low to protect teeth from decay. Over 8,000 communities are currently adjusting the fluoride in their community's water to a level that can protect the oral health of their citizens.

Over 170 million people, or 67 percent of the United States population served by public water supplies, drink water with optimal fluoride levels for

preventing decay. Of the 50 largest cities in the country, 43 are fluoridated. Although water fluoridation reaches some residents in every state, unfortunately, only 24 states are providing these benefits to 75 percent or more of their residents.

A significant advantage of water fluoridation is that all residents of a community can enjoy its protective benefit—at home, work, school, or play—simply by drinking fluoridated water or beverages and foods prepared with it. A person's income level or ability to receive routine dental care is not a barrier to receiving fluoridation's health benefits. Water fluoridation is a powerful strategy in our efforts to eliminate differences in health among people and is consistent with my emphasis on the importance of prevention.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recognized the fluoridation of drinking water as one of ten great public health achievements of the twentieth century. Water fluoridation has helped improve the quality of life in the United States by reducing pain and suffering related to tooth decay, time lost from school and work, and money spent to restore, remove, or replace decayed teeth. An economic analysis has determined that in most communities, every \$1 invested in fluoridation saves \$38 or more in treatment costs. Fluoridation is the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay and improve oral health over a lifetime, for both children and adults.

While we can be pleased with what has already been accomplished, it is clear that there is much yet to be done. Policymakers, community leaders, private industry, health professionals, the media, and the public should affirm that oral health is essential to general health and well being and *take action* to make ourselves, our families, and our communities healthier. I join previous Surgeons General in acknowledging the continuing public health role for community water fluoridation in enhancing the oral health of all Americans.

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