

Community Water Fluoridation



"...one of the 10 great public health achievements of the twentieth century."¹



Oral Health in Wisconsin: A Fact Sheet

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
Division of Public Health

What is the public health issue?

Oral health is integral to general health.² Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood.² The burden of disease is far worse for those who have limited access to prevention and treatment services. Left untreated, tooth decay can cause pain and tooth loss. Among children, untreated decay has been associated with difficulty in eating, sleeping, learning, and proper nutrition.³ Among adults, untreated decay and tooth loss can also have negative effects on an individual's self-esteem and employability.

In the U.S., tooth decay³ affects:

- ✓ 1 in 4 elementary school children
- ✓ 2 out of 3 adolescents
- ✓ 9 out of 10 adults

What is the impact of fluoridation?

Fluoride added to community drinking water at a concentration of 0.7 to 1.2 parts per million has repeatedly been shown to be a safe, inexpensive, and extremely effective method of preventing tooth decay.² Because community water fluoridation benefits everyone in the community, regardless of age and socioeconomic status, fluoridation provides protection against tooth decay in populations with limited access to prevention services. In fact, for every dollar spent on community water fluoridation, up to \$42 is saved in treatment costs for tooth decay.⁴ The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, a national independent, nonfederal, multidisciplinary task force appointed by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recently conducted a systematic review of studies of community water fluoridation. They found that, in communities that initiated fluoridation, the decrease in childhood decay was almost 30 percent over 3–12 years of follow-up.³

How is Wisconsin doing?

In 2002, 60 percent of Wisconsin's third-graders had experienced tooth decay.⁷ In 2002, nearly 22 percent of Wisconsin's 65+ population had lost all of their permanent teeth.⁴ In 2002, 90 percent of the population in Wisconsin on public water systems received fluoridated water. This translates into 63 percent of Wisconsin's total population receiving fluoridated water.

Related U.S. Healthy People 2010 Objectives⁵

- ✓ Increase percentage of persons on public water receiving fluoridated water to 75%
 - In Wisconsin, 90% of the population on public water receives fluoridated water.
- ✓ Reduce adults 65+ who have lost all their teeth to 20%.
 - In Wisconsin, 22% of adults 65+ have lost all of their teeth.
- ✓ Reduce tooth decay experience in children under 9 to 42%.
 - In Wisconsin, 60% of children under the age of 9 have experienced tooth decay.

Healthiest Wisconsin 2010 Objectives⁸

- By 2010, increase percentage of persons on public water supplies receiving fluoride by 4%.

What is Wisconsin doing?

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health provides support and technical assistance to local community water fluoridation programs. In collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources, we also monitor community water systems for quality control purposes. A listing of community water systems by fluoridation status is available at:

http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral_Health/pdf_files/2004WiFluorCensus.pdf

Limited funding is available for communities interested in initiating a fluoridation program. For communities that are not fluoridated, some limited funding is available for dietary fluoride supplement and school-based fluoride mouthrinse programs.

Strategies for Wisconsin's Future

- ✓ Encourage fluoride supplements or school-based fluoride mouthrinsing for those at increased risk for decay who are not receiving fluoridated drinking water.
- ✓ Encourage fluoride varnishes for those at increased risk for decay.
- ✓ Develop and use data from well-water testing programs.
- ✓ Continue supporting and funding Wisconsin's oral health program.
- ✓ Educate and empower the public regarding the benefits of fluoridation.

References

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