

Community Water Fluoridation

Washington Can Do More to Promote Oral Health

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral in almost all water supplies. However, it is not always present at the level needed to help prevent tooth decay (0.7 ppm). When tap water has a good balance of fluoride, people experience 25% less tooth decay over a lifetime.¹ Like using seat belts, adding vitamin D to milk or iodine to salt, community water fluoridation is a simple step to greatly improve the health of the entire community.

Today, roughly 73% of the people in the US are served by public water systems that have an effective level of fluoride. **Currently, only 56% of Washingtonians receive fluoridated water.** Leaving 44% of people without a good balance of fluoride to prevent cavities. **Washington state residents deserve better.**

Saving Money While Improving Oral Health

Support HB 1684 / SB 5587: Make it easier for communities to fluoridate, increase transparency for consumers, and promote oral health equity.

Fifty-six percent of people served by public water systems receive the benefits of fluoridated water – saving Washington state residents and businesses an estimated **\$389.5 million annually** through reduced treatment costs and fewer missed work days.

Oral health advocates are proposing legislation that will:

- Require larger water systems to include fluoridation in their routine planning for system improvements, in order to capture cost efficiencies in the planning process. This information would then be available to decision-makers and water customers in the event they would like to proceed with community water fluoridation.
- Provide funding to support local water systems to plan for fluoridation.
- Require a minimum of 90-days' public notice should a fluoridating water system consider ceasing fluoridation.
- Ask the Department of Health to conduct an oral health equity assessment and develop recommendations to address racial and ethnic health inequities through increased access to community water fluoridation and other measures.

Community water fluoridation is an equitable solution to prevent cavities. It is the most effective way to ensure that all local residents receive a proven form of cavity prevention. With fluoridated water, everyone can strengthen their teeth enamel simply by drinking tap water and using it to make soup, coffee and other foods and beverages.

LEARN MORE ABOUT COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION

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A Health Equity Issue

The health of your mouth affects your overall health and well-being. Unfortunately, too many people struggle with oral disease—US health officials report that tooth decay is the most common chronic disease for children and teens.²

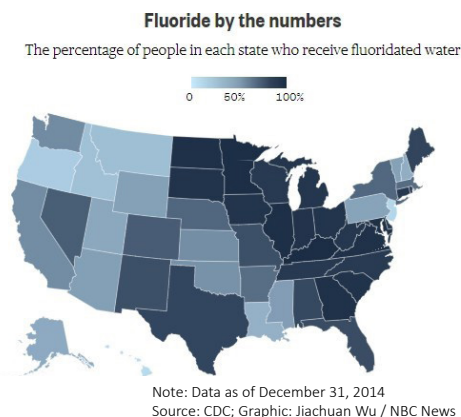
Systemic disparities, like lack of access to fluoridated water, perpetuate health disparities. **In Washington state, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native children have a 50% higher rate of decay.** Third graders from low-income households suffer from **rampant decay (7 or more decayed teeth)** at twice the rate of children from higher-income households.

These health disparities affect people at all stages of life:

- Children with dental problems are much more likely to miss school, and teens with recent dental pain are **four times more likely to earn lower grades.**³
- **More than one in four low-income Washingtonians** report that the condition of their teeth has negatively impacted their ability to interview for a job.⁴
- Without teeth, it is **harder for elders to get the nutrition they need** to be healthy.

A leading researcher called fluoridation “the most effective and practical method” of reducing the socioeconomic disparities that exist in oral health. He added: **“There is no practical alternative to water fluoridation for reducing these disparities in the United States.”**⁵

There is support for increasing access to community water fluoridation in this state. In 2019, a statewide task force formed to discuss strategies to reduce oral health disparities by preventing dental disease, with a key goal to ensure that more people in Washington state receive the benefits of community water fluoridation. Members represent public health, dental and medical providers, consumer advocates, and community-based organizations.



The Washington State Board of Health 2017 - 2022 Strategic Plan includes “Work with partners to promote fluoridation of drinking water and its oral health benefits.”¹⁰

More than 70 years of the practice has proven that fluoridated water promotes community oral health. **Nearly every major health organization in the US supports community water fluoridation for preventing tooth decay**, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Dental Association among others.

Endnotes

1. Statement on the Evidence Supporting the Safety and Effectiveness of Community Water Fluoridation. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved 10.29.2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/guidelines/cdc-statement-on-community-water-fluoridation.html>
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4. Washington's Oral Health and Well-Being. American Dental Association. Retrieved 08.21.2020. <https://www.ada.org/en/science-research/health-policy-institute/oral-health-and-well-being/Washington-facts>
5. Burt BA. Fluoridation and Social Equity. Journal of Public Health Dentistry. 2002;62(4):195-200. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1752-7325.2002.tb03445.x/abstract>
6. Griffin SO, Jones K, Tomar SL. An economic evaluation of community water fluoridation. J Public Health Dent. 2001;61(2):78-86.
7. J.M. O'Connell et al., “Costs and savings associated with community water fluoridation programs in Colorado,” Preventing Chronic Disease (November 2005), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1459459/>.
8. J.V. Kumar, O. Adekunle and T.A. Melnik, “Geographic Variation in Medicaid Claims for Dental Procedures in New York State: Role of Fluoridation Under Contemporary Conditions,” Public Health Reports, (September-October 2010) Vol. 125, No. 5, 647-54.
9. “Water Fluoridation Costs in Texas: Texas Health Steps,” Texas Department of Health, May 2000.
10. Washington State Board of Health 2017 - 2022 Strategic Plan. December 2016. Accessed March 2017 <http://sbh.wa.gov/Portals/7/Doc/Publications/2017-2022StrategicPlan-Final.pdf>
11. US Public Health Service Recommendations for Fluoride Concentration in Drinking Water for the Prevention of Tooth Decay. Public Health Reports, July-August 2015.

Savings to Washington State

In the US, dental services are the **third highest medical expenditure for families**, second only to heart conditions and trauma-related disorders. The CDC estimates a return on investment for ratepayers (including reduced productivity losses and treatment costs) of **\$4 for every dollar** spent on fluoridation in small communities of 5,000 people or less and **\$27 in large communities** of 200,000 people or more.⁶

Colorado: The state saved nearly \$149 million in 2003 by avoiding unnecessary treatment costs for both children and adults on Medicaid through community water fluoridation.⁷

New York: In a studied controlled comparison of fluoridated and unfluoridated communities, not providing fluoridation cost the state an additional \$23.65 more per year per Medicaid-insured child in treatment costs.⁸

Texas: The Medicaid program saved an average of \$24 per child per year in communities with fluoridated water.⁹

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“Community water fluoridation is the most cost-effective method of delivering fluoride to all members of the community regardless of age, educational attainment, or income level.”¹¹

US PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, 2015