

# FactSheet

Para Su Información

## Fluoride

From 1900 through 1999, the average American's lifespan has increased by about 30 years. Most of the increase in longevity stems from substantially better public health practices.

Fluoride's contribution to improved public health cannot be underestimated. The Centers for Disease Control and Protection declared fluoridation of community water to be one of the top ten greatest public health achievements in the 20th Century.

According to the American Dental Association, the benefits of water fluoridation include:

- Reduces tooth decay
- Prevents loss of teeth
- Reduces dental infection, pain, and suffering

### What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a trace mineral found in plants, animals and soils, and is necessary to help build stronger bones and make teeth more resistant to decay.

Fluoride is found in all water sources through out the world, including rivers and the oceans. The Colorado River, our source of drinking water, contains an insufficient amount of fluoride to prevent tooth decay.

### What is fluoridation?

Community water fluoridation is the precise adjustment of existing naturally occurring fluoride levels in drinking water to an optimal fluoride level recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service for the prevention of dental decay.

Community water fluoridation is the single most effective health measure to prevent tooth decay. Fortifying community water with fluoride is comparable to adding iodine to salt, vitamin D to milk, and vitamin C to orange juice.

### How does fluoride reduce tooth decay and benefit all age groups?

Tooth decay is a disease in which bacteria found in the mouth attack the outer portion of the tooth (the enamel) and weaken them. Unchecked, the bacteria can penetrate the internal structure of the tooth and surrounding gum area, leading to pain and loss of teeth.

The saliva of people who drink fluoridated water contains trace amounts of fluoride and provides continual protection to their teeth and reduces acidic bacteria.

Fluoride protects against cavities and decay, and the erosion of adult teeth when gums start to recede. Adults experiencing gum line recession are at risk for root decay because the root surface becomes exposed to decay-causing bacteria in the mouth. Studies demonstrate that fluoride is incorporated into the structure of the root surface, making it more resistant to decay.

Fluoride protects teeth in two ways:

- Topically
- Systemically

#### Topically

Topical use of fluoride includes fluoride toothpaste, fluoride rinses, and professionally applied fluoride foams, gels, and varnishes. Used in this manner, fluoride is actually absorbed into the surface of the teeth, making the enamel stronger and more resistant to decay.

Even in teeth that are beginning to decay, fluoride use strengthens enamel and stops further decay in people of all ages.

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## Systemically

Systemic use of fluoride means to ingest fluoride into the body, either through fluoride supplements or by drinking fluoridated water. In young developing teeth systemic fluoride becomes incorporated into the overall tooth development and provides long-lasting protection against tooth decay. Mature teeth also benefit from systemic use of fluoride.

### Why was fluoride added to drinking water?

The Colorado River, like other bodies of water throughout the world, contains naturally occurring amounts of fluoride. The natural amount found in the water supplied to Clark County is lower than protective levels. By increasing the amount in our drinking water slightly, to .08 parts per million, health experts expect to see a long-term drop in the levels of tooth decay in Southern Nevada.

Studies have shown that people living in cities with fluoridated water supplies demonstrate a significant decrease in tooth decay. Keeping teeth healthy and strong over an entire lifetime will result in fewer cavities and lower dental bills, and is an important part of maintaining overall good health. Adding fluoride to the water is viewed as an economical and effective way to strengthen the teeth and prevent decay in all age groups.

### Is fluoride safe for senior citizens?

Drinking fluoridated water is safe for senior citizens. To maintain good dental health, senior citizens need

to drink fluoridated water as well as use fluoridated toothpaste and rinses.

Just as daily doses of calcium help make bones strong and durable, so does a daily intake of both “systemic” and “topical” doses of fluoride. Teeth and bones do not store fluoride permanently, but need regular doses to stay strong and healthy.

### Will fluoridation cause health problems?

More than fifty years of scientific evidence shows that fluoridation of the community water supply is both safe and effective in improving oral health.

In August 1992, the National Research Council released a report prepared for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) confirming that adding fluoride to water does not contribute to cancer, kidney failure, bone disease or Alzheimer’s disease.

### Where can I get more information?

Contact your dentist or visit the Southern Nevada Health District’s website at [www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org](http://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org).



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