North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

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Community Fluoridation
Position Statement from the Office of the State Health Director
April 2014

The safety of fluoridating community water has been studied for almost seventy years – more thoroughly than any other public health measure. Not only has the practice been repeatedly confirmed as safe, it is touted as being the most cost-effective preventive measure that can be taken to reduce tooth decay in people of all ages. A broad range of dental and non-dental health organizations support fluoridation (see www.ilikemyteeth.org/fluoridation/health-experts-on-fluoride/), including the, N.C. Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health.

North Carolina has supported the fluoridation of drinking water for at least sixty-five years. Charlotte began fluoridating its water supply in 1949, and at that time, was the largest water system in the world to adjust fluoride to the recommended optimal level. North Carolina has continued to be a leader in this area and, as recent figures show, 87 percent of the residents in our state accessing water from a community water system receive the benefits of drinking fluoridated water.

As the size of the population receiving fluoridated water has grown, our statewide dental surveys have documented dramatic improvements in the dental health of our citizens. At the same time, dental products with fluoride – such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, prescription fluoride supplements, and professionally applied fluoride products – have grown as well. Because of this, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) and other public health agencies understand that it is now possible to slightly lower the level of fluoride in water and still maintain the health benefits associated with fluoridating water supplies. For this reason, HHS has proposed changing the recommended level for community water systems to 0.7 milligrams per liter, down from the current maximum of 1.2 milligrams per liter.

While it is clear that the amount of fluoridation in community water supplies can be reduced, research also shows that the practice of fluoridating water supplies should continue. Completely eliminating fluoride from our water supplies would dramatically affect the dental health of our state residents. Community water fluoridation is credited with reducing tooth decay by as much as 25 percent – and that is over and above the effects of fluoridated products such as toothpaste and mouth rinse. Based on this information, it is easy to see that eliminating established fluoridation programs would impose substantial costs upon our health and our communities.

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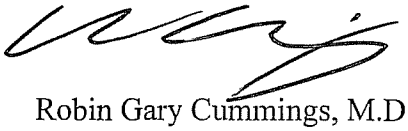
Additional information about fluoridation can be found at the following websites.

- The Campaign for Dental Health: www.ilikemyteeth.org/
- The Center for Fluoride Research Analysis: www.fluoridescience.org/
- The American Dental Association (fluoridation): www.ada.org/fluoride.aspx
- CDC Community Water Fluoridation: www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/
- Oral Health in America, A Report of the Surgeon General: www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/SurgeonGeneral/sgr/
- N.C. Oral Health Section: www.ncdhhs.gov/dph/oralhealth/

Staff in the N.C. Division of Public Health, Oral Health Section, routinely monitors fluoridation literature to remain current on the issue. For additional information, please contact Dr. Robert Leddy, Acting Section Chief, at 919-707-5480 or Robert.Leddy@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



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