



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Brush Up on Oral Health



June 2014

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We'd Like to Know

Please tell us what you think about the newsletter and how you're using it. We also want to know what topics you would like to learn more about. We'd love your ideas for improving the newsletter. Select the link to go to the [feedback form](#).

Did You Know?

It is safe and recommended for young children to:

- Brush with fluoride toothpaste every day
- Drink water with fluoride in it
- Receive fluoride varnish during dental or well-child visits

Community Water Fluoridation

Fluoride is an element found in nature, including soil, rocks, and plants. Water also contains fluoride naturally, but amounts vary. Fluoride is important because it prevents tooth decay. All water naturally has fluoride, but amounts vary. Since most water doesn't have enough natural fluoride to prevent tooth decay, many towns and cities add fluoride to their water supply. This is called "community water fluoridation."

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* talks about why community water fluoridation is important. It offers tips for Head Start staff to help parents choose fluoridated tap (faucet) water for their family. It also gives ideas for creating a tap-water-friendly home for children.

The Importance of Community Water Fluoridation

Community water fluoridation works in two ways. First, drinking tap water with fluoride strengthens children's permanent teeth that have not come into the mouth yet. This helps prevent tooth decay. Second, when children and adults drink tap water with fluoride, fluoride goes into the saliva. Fluoridated saliva washes the teeth and makes the outsides of the teeth strong. This also helps prevent tooth decay.

Children and adults who drink tap water with fluoride have:

- Fewer cavities
- Less need to have teeth pulled
- Less pain and suffering from tooth decay

Strategies to Help Parents Choose Fluoridated Tap Water for Their Family

- **Teach parents about fluoride and fluoridated tap water.** Many parents have heard about fluoride and fluoridated water but don't know that it prevents tooth decay. Putting up posters about fluoridated tap water can motivate parents to talk about it. These free posters can be ordered from [The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy](#) at the University of Maryland School of Public Health.
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- **Help parents find out if the family's water supply is fluoridated.** To find out if a family's community water is fluoridated, go to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [My Water's Fluoride](#) website. You can choose your state and county to find a list of communities with fluoridated water. You can also call your [state oral health program](#) and ask if your community's water is fluoridated. State oral health programs can also help families on well water find out if it has fluoride. If the well water doesn't have enough fluoride, encourage parents to talk to their dentist or doctor about fluoride tablets or drops for their child.
 - **Explain to parents that tap water is safe to drink.** Tap water in the United States is safe to drink. But some families, especially those from other countries, don't know that. These families may drink bottled water instead. Most bottled water does not contain fluoride.
 - **Educate parents that tap water is cheap and easy to find.** Help parents learn how much money and time they can save if they drink tap water. Parents don't have to go to store to buy it. It comes from the faucet at home. Drinking tap water instead of bottled water is also good for the environment because plastic bottles that can cause pollution are not being used.

Cook's Corner: Creating a Tap-Water-Friendly Home for Children

Here are some tips Head Start staff can share with parents to help children drink tap water.

Drink tap water. Children like to do what adults do. Set a good example.

Offer tap water instead of drinks with sugar. It can take up to 10 times before a child's taste buds decide if they like something. Don't give up! Keep offering children tap water.

Keep a pitcher of flavored tap water in the refrigerator. Some children don't like the taste of plain tap water. Try adding favorite cut-up fruits, vegetables, or fresh herbs to tap water.

Don't keep drinks with sugar in the refrigerator. Keep pop (soda), fruit-flavored drinks, and other drinks with sugar out of the refrigerator. If children don't see them, they are less likely to ask for them.

Offer tap water during the day. Give tap water to children during the day and when they are thirsty. Bring tap water with you when you and your child go to the park or shopping. Drinking water helps children stay healthy.

Other strategies for encouraging children to drink tap water can be found in the [April 2013](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health*.

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The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to nchinfo@aap.org or call (888) 227-5125.

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School readiness begins with health!