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Fluoride to Prevent Dental Caries

The best protection from dental caries (tooth decay, cavities) is good oral hygiene, regular access to professional oral health care, a healthy diet of low sugar food and beverages, the mineral fluoride, and dental sealants. Fluoride has resulted in a tremendous reduction of tooth decay and loss of teeth in the Illinois population.

What is fluoride?

- Fluoride is a mineral your body needs to grow and be healthy. Fluoride makes teeth and bones strong, and it protects your teeth against decay. It can also be found naturally in soil, plants, animals, air, and water sources.
- Many research studies have proven the safety and benefits of fluoridated water. For 75 years (<https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/basics/anniversary.htm>), people in the United States have been drinking water with added fluoride and enjoying the benefits of better dental health.
- For more than 50 years, Illinois residents have benefited from optimally fluoridated water. In 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) water fluoridation report calculated that optimally fluoridated water reaches 98.5% of Illinois' population.

How does fluoride help your teeth?

- Fluoride in the body is necessary when teeth are forming under the gums to make teeth strong.
- Fluoride on the surface works after teeth have erupted to continue to keep teeth strong.
- According to CDC, drinking water that contains the recommended levels of fluoride reduces tooth decay by 25%.

What is the best way to get fluoride?

- Natural fluoride is found in food, plants, animals, and ground water, but the amounts attained in this way are usually too low to protect teeth from decay. Most Illinois communities add small amounts of fluoride to their water supplies, which is called water fluoridation. Fluoridation's contribution to dramatic declines in both the prevalence and severity of tooth decay has led the CDC to name water fluoridation one of 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.
- You can also get fluoride through toothpastes or mouth rinses approved by the American Dental Association.

- Fluoride varnish treatments can be received in a dental office.

How can I check how much fluoride is in my water?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends a level of 0.7 milligrams per Liter (mg/L) of fluoride in your drinking water. This is the level that prevents tooth decay and promotes good oral health.

Community Water Source

- CDC's My Water's Fluoride (MWF) website (https://nccd.cdc.gov/doh_mwf/Default/Default.aspx) allows people to learn about their community's drinking water fluoridation levels. MWF also provides information on the number of people served by the water system, the water source, and if the water system fluoridates its water supply.

Private Well Water

- People living in rural areas with private water wells might not have the right amount of fluoride in their tap water. It is a good idea to have the water tested. Visit this website for more information about water testing: <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/drinking-water/private-well-users/Pages/well-water-testing.aspx>.
- If your water well proves to lack the proper amount of fluoride, your dentist or doctor can prescribe a vitamin with fluoride in a pill or liquid form. This is best for children 6 months to 14 years of age.

Resources

NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

American Dental Association – Mouth Healthy

<https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/fluoride-superhero>

Centers for Disease and Infection Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/index.html>

My Water's Fluoride

https://nccd.cdc.gov/DOH_MWF/Default/AboutMWF.aspx

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

<https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/drinking-water/private-well-users/Pages/well-water-testing.aspx>