

Community Water Fluoridation

“...one of the 10 great public health achievements of the twentieth century.”¹



Oral Health in Arkansas: A Fact Sheet

What is the public health issue?

Oral health is integral to general health.² Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood.² The burden of disease is far worse for those who have limited access to prevention and treatment services. Tooth decay, left untreated, can cause pain and tooth loss. Among children, untreated decay has been associated with difficulty in eating, sleeping, learning, and proper nutrition.³ Among adults, untreated decay and tooth loss can also have negative effects on an individual's self-esteem and employability.

In the U.S., tooth decay³ affects:

- ✓ 1 in 4 elementary school children
- ✓ 2 out of 3 adolescents
- ✓ 9 out of 10 adults

What is the impact of fluoridation?

Fluoride added to community drinking water at a concentration of 0.7 to 1.2 parts per million has repeatedly been shown to be a safe, inexpensive, and extremely effective method of preventing tooth decay.² Because community water fluoridation benefits everyone in the community, regardless of age and socioeconomic status, fluoridation provides protection against tooth decay in populations with limited access to prevention services. In fact, for every dollar spent on community water fluoridation, up to \$42 is saved in treatment costs for tooth decay.⁴ The National Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent, nonfederal, multidisciplinary task force appointed by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recently conducted a systematic review of studies of community water fluoridation. They found that, in communities that initiated fluoridation, the decrease in childhood decay was almost 30 percent over 3–12 years of follow-up.³

How is Arkansas doing?

In 2003, more than 60% of Arkansas' third-graders had experienced tooth decay, and almost 30 percent of Arkansas' 65+ population had lost all of their permanent teeth.⁴ In 2004, only 62 percent of the population in Arkansas on public water systems will be receiving fluoridated water.

Related Healthy People U.S. 2010 Objectives⁵

- ✓ Increase percentage of persons on public water receiving fluoridated water to 75%
 - In Arkansas, only 62% of the population on public water receives fluoridated water.
- ✓ Reduce adults 65+ who have lost all their teeth to 20%.
 - In Arkansas, 29.2% of adults 65+ have lost all of their teeth.
- ✓ Reduce tooth decay experience in children under 9 to 42%.
 - In Arkansas, 61% of children under the age of 9 have experienced tooth decay.

What is Arkansas doing?

Since 1999, the percentage of the Arkansas population enjoying the benefits of community water fluoridation has grown from 49 to 62%. Under the leadership of the Arkansas Department of Health Office of Oral Health, two to three communities each year initiate water fluoridation for their residents. The ADH public awareness campaign on fluoridation has reached more than a million Arkansans with brochures and radio public service announcements – heralding the slogan “*got teeth? get fluoride!*” Each year, every dentist, dental hygienist, pediatrician and family practice physician in Arkansas receives information about current fluoridation status in their communities and guidelines on proper fluoride supplementation for children in fluoride-deficient areas. In addition, ADH provides a free service for dentists and physicians to have patients’ private water sources tested for background fluoride levels in the drinking water.

Strategies for Arkansas’ Future

- ✓ Encourage fluoride supplements for those at increased risk for decay who can not receive fluoridated drinking water.
- ✓ Maintain the private well-water testing program.
- ✓ Continue supporting and funding the Arkansas Office of Oral Health .
- ✓ Educate and empower the public regarding the benefits of fluoridation.

References

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Arkansas Department of Health
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