



Brush Up on Oral Health

Community Water Fluoridation

Fluoride is a mineral found in nature, including soil, rocks, and plants. 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." Because community water fluoridation is effective in helping to prevent tooth decay, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named it one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.

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 where it is available. It also gives ideas for making home tap water friendly 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

Did You Know?

It is safe and recommended for children to:

- Brush with fluoride toothpaste twice a day
- Drink water with fluoride
- Get fluoride varnish during dental and well-child visits

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. [I Like My Teeth](#) posters, also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#), can be downloaded from the [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#).
- **Help parents find out if the family's water is fluoridated.** To find out if a family's water is fluoridated, go to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [My Water's Fluoride](#) website. Choose your state and county to find a list of communities with fluoridated water. Your [state oral health program](#) can tell if your community water is fluoridated. State oral health programs can also help families on well water find out if their water has enough fluoride. If the well water doesn't have enough fluoride, encourage parents to talk to their dentist or doctor about a fluoride supplement (tablets or drops) for their child. See the [February 2017](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information about fluoride supplements, also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- **Explain to parents that tap water is safe to drink.** In most communities in the United States, tap water is safe to drink. But some parents, especially those from other countries, don't know that. These parents may give their child bottled water instead. Most bottled water does not contain fluoride. If parents have questions about the safety of their local water, they can contact the [Environmental Protection Agency Drinking Water Hotline](#) at safewater@epa.gov or at 800-426-4791. Head Start health managers can also contact their [state office of oral health](#) or their [state dental hygienist liaison \(DHL\)](#) for more information about drinking water safety in their communities.
- **Educate parents that tap water is cheap and easy to find.** Help parents learn they can save money and time if their family drinks tap water instead of bottled water. Parents don't have to go to store to buy water. It comes from the faucet at home. Drinking tap water instead of bottled water is also good for the environment, because it reduces the use of plastic bottles.



Cook's Corner: Making Home Tap Water Friendly 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 out. Drinking water helps children stay healthy.
- Other strategies for encouraging children to drink tap water can be found in the [February 2018 Brush Up on Oral Health](#) tip sheet, also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#). The *Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles* handout [Encouraging Your Child to Drink Water](#), also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#), provides tips for making water appealing to children as a drink.



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