

Village View by Andrea Leonard



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February is Dental Health Month in Massachusetts. This shines a bright spotlight on fluoridation.

First, what is fluoridation? It's the addition of very small quantities (about one part per million) of the chemical, fluoride, to public water supplies.

Why? Mountains of evidence shows fluoridation results in a large reduction in dental decay.

This discovery was made in 1941 by dental research-scientists studying the health of people who lived in an area of Michigan and who were naturally free from dental caries. Fluorides, it was found, was the secret of their healthy teeth.

Adding fluoride to drinking water is a single, simple, preventive measure against tooth decay. Unlike many medical treatments, it doesn't depend on an individual's knowledge or motivation.

After several years, the number of cavities in children's teeth is reduced by as much as 70 percent. Children who grow up drinking fluoridated water seldom need a tooth pulled because of decay.

Another important effect has been discovered more recently: fluoridation reduces the incidence of osteoporosis, a common problem of older people who frequently suffer broken hips, disintegrating vertebrae and brittle bones in other parts of their bodies.

Decades of scientific field trials and laboratory research, some in areas of the world where the natural fluoride content is as high as 14 parts per million, establish beyond reasonable doubt that fluorinated water is safe for young and old alike.

One study was conducted in New Haven, Conn; following three years of fluoridation, 2,159 children in grades 1, 4, 7 and 10 were examined in 1970, and findings compared with those of a prefluoridation study in 1967.

Analysis by age indicated fluoridation of the water for three years has been a highly significant factor in reducing the prevalence of tooth decay among New Haven school children, without damage to teeth or other parts of the body.

Proponents of fluoridation are an impressive group.

Dr. Frederick Stare, Chairman of the Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health, states: "Abundant evidence indicates children as old as 16 years when they first receive fluoridated drinking water obtain some benefit. Of further importance, the benefit is permanent as long as individuals continue to receive fluoridated water. Moreover, since eventually children become adults and aging adults, in a generation or two the entire population benefits."

The U.S. Public Health Service, Division of Dental Health, has a leaflet expressing the need in terms of the nation's dental bill, the loss of manhours of production time and

(about one part in a million) is the most practical and most effective method of inhibiting tooth decay. If such water is drunk continuously, the effects last throughout life and are the same whether the fluoride is present naturally or is added to the water."

Here at home, Massachusetts soil is particularly poor in fluoride-containing minerals; the water, although it does contain some fluoride, hasn't enough to produce really healthy teeth.

Is fluoridation expensive?

It costs only pennies per person per year. Not per day; per year. If every community in Massachusetts treated its water supply, the annual saving in unneeded dental treatments would be \$700 million -- a return of approximately \$50 for every dollar invested in fluoridation.

Is fluoridation difficult?

No. A report on engineering aspects, prepared for the Division of Environmental Health contains data of interest to Boards of Health, water departments and others considering the program.

Copies are available on a loan basis through the Division of Environmental Health, Room 320, 600 Washington Street, Boston.

Are other Massachusetts communities fluoridating their water supplies? One after another is being added to the growing list of cities and towns supplying treated water.

North Reading, population 11,752, began serving its citizens in this way in August, 1972. In November, 1972, the City of Haverhill, population approximately 45,000, began fluoridating its water. Town Fathers in Fitchburg have given the go-ahead to fluoridation. This will bring treated water to another 43,000 Bay Staters.

What about the Town of Barnstable?

the crucial shortage of dentists.

"Fluoridation...No Better Health Investment," is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402, for 10¢, or \$5.50 for 100 copies.

The House of Delegates to the American Dental Association, at a meeting commemorating its 25th anniversary, endorsed fluoridation with the following statement:

"Universal fluoridation is the necessary foundation to improving the dental health of the nation. The American Dental Association urges state legislatures, municipal governments and all public officials and agencies involved in health planning or care programs to give the highest priority to implementing fluoridation without further delay."

The World Health Organization recently endorsed FLUORIDES AND HUMAN HEALTH, adding the book, which was reviewed by 93 dental and medical specialists in various countries, to its health monograph series as the culmination of many years of preparation by 20 contributors from ten countries.

Seven million Canadians can't be wrong! By 1970 over 7,000,000 Canadians were drinking treated water daily. The Yukon now leads the provinces of Canada with 100 percent fluoridation of piped water supplies.

By mid - 1971, 47 percent of the total population of Ireland, more than 1,386,000 people, received fluoridated water in some 75 communities.

All the major cities are fluoridated, including Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford, and almost all towns larger than 10,000. Ireland was the first nation to enact legislation to require treatment of all water supplies with a law passed in 1960 and upheld in two long legal proceedings in 1963-64.

Even the Fiji Islands -- an article in the Fiji Times, the local English-language newspaper, reveals this small developing nation, with limited resources and many economic problems, fluoridates its public water supply.

There are those who oppose it. However, the Ohio Supreme Court upheld the state's fluoridation law by denying a suit contending the fluoridation requirement violated the home rule provisions of the Ohio constitution.

Physicians in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, denounced an anti-fluoridation ad as "little more than an assortment of misleading and inaccurate statements."

In investigating case histories of alleged adverse effects submitted by the Committee Against Fluoridation, the Medical Society found "a gross distortion of facts and countless inaccuracies in information offered as 'evidence' by the committee."

Luther Terry, M.D., in a guest editorial in PARENT'S MAGAZINE, pointed to a 'matter of national shame' -- that about half the children who could benefit from fluoridation are denied it. "As long as adults remain indecisive about the issue, children will grow up with an accumulation of dental problems to plague them throughout life."

Dr. Terry is former Surgeon General of the United States Public University of Pennsylvania.

The European Organization for Caries Research recently adopted the following statement at its general assembly in Debrecen, Hungary:

The Organization concluded "in the light of evidence from well-conducted studies throughout the world, drinking water containing the optimum concentration of fluoride