

Fluoridation talking points: Message on water fluoridation is simple, straightforward, and backed by nearly 60 years of science

It ain't the things we *don't* know that get us in trouble," penned the 19th century humorist Artemus Ward, "it's the things we know that just ain't so."

Ward was not talking about fluoridation when he wrote those now-famous lines, but he easily could have been. Few public health issues have generated as much misinformation and confusion as the optimal fluoridation of community water supplies. As ODA prepares to bring its message to the Oregon Legislature, we need to put to rest some recurring myths about fluoridation.

The American Dental Association, as well as other reputable health and science organizations, and government agencies have Web sites that provide information on fluorides and fluoridation. These sites provide information that is consistent with generally accepted scientific knowledge. However, not all information posted on the Internet is based on scientific fact. Searching the Internet for "fluoride" or "water fluoridation" directs individuals to a number of Web sites. Some of the content found in the sites is scientifically sound. Other less scientific sites may look highly technical, but contain information based on data that is unconfirmed or has not gained widespread acceptance. Commercial interests, such as the sale of water filters, may also be pro-

moted.

Since 1956, ADA's *Fluoridation Facts* has been one of the most respected sources of generally accepted scientific information on water fluoridation. With 237 references, it provides authoritative answers to the most common questions about fluoridation, while debunking the bogus claims that have been leveled at the practice over the years. The entire publication is available online at: www.ada.org/public/topics/fluoride/facts/index.asp. From the ADA Web site individuals can also connect with other reputable Web sites for more information about fluoride.

Scare tactics

Opponents of water fluoridation have variously accused the practice of causing bone deterioration, cancer, adverse effects on human enzyme activity, altered immune function, AIDS, Down Syndrome, genetic hazards, adverse neurological reactions, Alzheimer's Disease, heart disease, impaired kidney function, poor quality water, and numerous other scary maladies. As ADA categorically states in *Fluoridation Facts*: **there is no generally accepted scientific knowledge connecting optimal water fluoridation with any of these conditions.**

When talking with your representatives and senators, the key points to remember about

water fluoridation are as follows:

- Fluoridation is a community health measure that benefits people of all ages.
- Fluoridation is safe.
- Fluoridation is cost-effective because it saves money on dental treatment needs.

Fluoride is a natural element. It is found in rocks, soil, fresh water, and ocean water. In fact, waters in and around the United States have natural fluoride levels that range from 0.1 parts per million to more than 12 parts per million. While some communities are lucky enough to have naturally occurring optimal levels of fluoride (0.7 - 1.2 parts per million) in their water supplies, most do not. Water fluoridation simply means adjusting the naturally occurring level of fluoride in the water to a level that is optimum for good oral health.

Like many common substances essential to life and good health—salt, iron, vitamins A and D, chlorine, oxygen, and even water itself—fluoride can be toxic in excessive quantities. However, acute fluoride toxicity occurring from the ingestion of optimally fluoridated water is impossible. The amount of fluoride necessary to cause death for a human adult (155 pound man) has been estimated to be 5-10 grams of sodium fluoride, ingested at one time. This is approximately 10,000 to 20,000 times as much fluoride as is

consumed at one time in a single 8 ounce glass of optimally fluoridated water.

The possibility of adverse health effects from continuous low level consumption of fluoride over long periods has been extensively studied. As with other nutrients, fluoride is safe and effective when used and consumed properly. No charge against the benefits and safety of fluoridation has ever been substantiated by generally accepted scientific knowledge. After 50 years of research and practical experience, the prepon-

derance of scientific evidence indicates that fluoridation of community water supplies is both safe and effective.

Likewise, there is no scientific evidence that optimal levels of fluoride affect the quality of water. Nearly all water supplies must undergo various treatment processes to be safe and suitable for human consumption. The substances used for this purpose include aluminum sulfate, ferric chloride, ferric sulfate, activated carbon, lime, soda ash and, of course, chlorine. Fluoride is added only to water that has

lower-than-optimal levels of this mineral.

Clever use of emotionally charged scare tactics by fluoridation opponents often creates needless fear and confusion. The best tool to combat this type of propaganda is education and reliance on *reputable* science. Talk to your patients and encourage them to write their legislators in support of statewide fluoridation. Cutting dental care costs by decreasing dental decay is something we can do to improve oral health and save money.

ODA's guide to contacting your legislator

General communication tips

- **Address your legislator properly and be sure you spell his or her name correctly.** Nothing says “toss me” louder than a misspelled name.
- **Identify legislation by title and number.** With thousands of bills under consideration each session, this is the **only** way your legislator will know what you're talking about.
- **Be brief.** Get to the point in the first paragraph. Keep your letter to one page.
- **Be timely.** The earlier you get to a bill in the legislative process, the easier it is to make a difference.
- **Be clear.** Do not expect your legislator to guess what you have in mind. State **exactly** what it is you want him or her to do. Vote for a bill? Vote against a bill? Hold a hearing?
- **Be constructive.** If you are urging the legislator to vote against something, try to offer a reasonable alternative if possible.
- **Be pleasant.** Remember that legislators hold **all** the cards during the legislative session. Do not threaten, coerce, or be patronizing; it will only hurt your cause.
- **Write to legislators from your own district.** If the bill is still in committee, you may also write to the committee members and chair. Otherwise, focus your letters within your district.
- **Address only one issue per letter.** A “shotgun” approach is confusing and will greatly diminish the impact of your letter.
- **Send originals, not copies.** Letters should **always** be originals. Do not send form letters or photocopies. If you cannot be bothered to **write** a personal letter, why should the legislator be bothered to **read** it?
- **Use your professional letterhead and sign the letter with a blue-ink ballpoint pen.** Personally written letters generally carry more weight than e-mails or telephone calls (provided there is sufficient time to write). A blue-ink ballpoint pen shows that the signature is an original.
- **Ask for a response.** Ask the legislator to reply to you with his or her position on the issue.
- **Remember to say “thank you.”** Thanking a legislator for helping your cause is a great way to build rapport and pave the way for future communications.



Locating your legislator

Don't know your district?

Log on to: www.leg.state.or.us.
Select “Find Your Legislator” and enter your *home* address.

To leave a phone message:

Phone 1-800-332-2313 and ask for your legislator by name

Addressing Senators:

The Honorable FULL NAME
900 Court St., N.E., Room _____
Salem, Oregon 97301
Dear Senator LAST NAME:

Addressing Representatives:

The Honorable FULL NAME
900 Court St., N.E., Room _____
Salem, Oregon 97301
Dear Representative LAST NAME:

Letters should close with:
“Respectfully,” or “Sincerely,”

Remember to keep ODA informed of all legislative contacts you make. Leave a phone message for Jane Myers, ODA director of government affairs at 503-559-1838 or e-mail: majanemyers@aol.com. This will allow her to mention how many contacts have been made.



17898 Southwest McEwan Road • Portland, Oregon 97224-7798
Phone: 503-620-3230 • Toll-free: 800-452-5628 • Fax: 503-620-4169
On the web: www.oregondental.org