

Division of Public Health Update
on
Proposed Revised Fluoride Level in Drinking Water Recommendations

On January 7, 2011, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a notice proposing a change to the recommendation for the optimal fluoride level in drinking water to prevent tooth decay. The new recommendation, 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water, replaces the previous recommended range of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams per liter. In Wisconsin, we currently fluoridate at 1.0 milligrams of fluoride per liter, so this would change our recommended level from 1.0 mg/l to 0.7 mg/l.

There are several reasons for this change, including that Americans have access to more sources of fluoride than they did when water fluoridation was first introduced in the United States. The HHS's updated recommendation regarding the optimal level of fluoride for public water supplies that adjust fluoride levels to prevent tooth decay is based upon the latest science. This decision will continue to protect Americans' dental health while also minimizing the chance of fluorosis. Dental fluorosis in the United States appears mostly in the very mild or mild form - as barely visible lacy white markings or spots on the enamel.

This announcement simply recognizes that since fluoride is reaching children from more sources today than it was in the early 1960's, it makes sense to adjust the recommended level in the drinking water. Community water fluoridation is a safe, effective, and inexpensive way to prevent dental caries. This modality benefits persons in all age groups and of all SES, including those difficult to reach through other public health programs and private dental care. Community water fluoridation also is the most cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay among populations living in areas with adequate community water supply systems. Continuation of community water fluoridation for these populations and its adoption in additional communities are the foundation for sound caries-prevention programs.

The notice of the proposed recommendation will be published in the Federal Register soon, and HHS will accept comments from the public and stakeholders on the proposed recommendation for 30 days. HHS is expecting to publish final guidance for community water fluoridation by the spring 2011. An official recommendation will follow after the final guidance from HHS is released.

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health is in communication with the Drinking Water & Groundwater Program personnel in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on this issue. The DNR is also in communication with Regional DNR staff and with local water works operators.

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health will continue to provide updated information on these recommendations.

More information can be found on the Wisconsin Oral Health Program website:
http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/oral_health/index.htm.