What is the public health issue?

Oral health is integral to general health. Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood. The burden of disease is far worse for those who have restricted access to prevention and treatment services, which makes using evidence-based prevention strategies like community water fluoridation so vitally important. Left untreated, tooth decay can cause pain and tooth loss. Among children, untreated tooth decay has been associated with difficulty in eating, sleeping, learning and proper nutrition. Among adults, untreated decay and tooth loss can also have negative effects on an individual’s self-esteem and employability.

What is the impact of fluoridation?

Fluoride added to community drinking water has repeatedly been shown to be a safe, inexpensive, and extremely effective method of preventing tooth decay. 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. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, a national 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. Communities with optimally fluoridated water benefit by having improved oral health of their community members.
What is Wisconsin doing?

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health provides support and technical assistance to local community water fluoridation programs. In collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources, we also monitor community water systems for quality control purposes. A listing of community water systems by fluoridation status is available at: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral Health/. Fluoride equipment grant funds are available to communities that need to update existing equipment or are interested in initiating water fluoridation. In addition to initiating, we have funds available for communities that need to update fluoride equipment.

Strategies for Wisconsin’s Future

✓ Encourage fluoride supplements for children at increased risk for decay who are not receiving fluoridated drinking water.
✓ Encourage fluoride varnishes for those at increased risk for decay.
✓ Educate and empower the public regarding the benefits of fluoridation.
✓ Provide funding to local communities that need to upgrade water fluoridation equipment.

References


Adapted from a fact sheet developed by the Oral Health Program, Bureau of Health, Maine Department of Human Services, 2004, in cooperation with the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors and funding from Division of Oral Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cooperative agreement # US5/CCU723036-01) and Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration (cooperative agreement # U44MC00177-04-02).

For more information, contact:
Department of Health Services
Division of Public Health,
Oral Health Program,
PO Box 2659,
Madison, WI 53701-2659
(608) 266-0876