

# What is fluoride and what are the benefits of water fluoridation?

Fluoride is a natural mineral that may be found in many water sources – even oceans and lakes. It helps keep teeth strong and healthy by making the outer surface of your teeth even harder which helps prevent the acid in the foods and beverages we eat and drink from causing cavities. Fluoride can also help repair weakened tooth structure before cavities can form in both children and adults.

- **Studies show water fluoridation reduces cavities by at least 25%** in children and adults. It especially benefits people who are not able to get regular dental care.
- **It is safe and effective.** Fluoride, like calcium and sodium, is another mineral that contributes to a healthy body. Adding fluoride to water is much like adding vitamin D to milk.
- More adults are keeping their natural teeth throughout their lifetimes due in part to the benefits they receive from water fluoridation.
- By preventing tooth decay, community water fluoridation has been shown to save money, both for families and the healthcare system.

## What is fluoride varnish?

Fluoride varnish is a coating painted on teeth with a brush or cotton swab. This helps prevent new cavities from starting and stop the spread of cavities that have already started. Fluoride now comes in flavors children like and is painless. All a child needs to do is not eat or drink for 30-60 minutes to let the fluoride harden.

## Who should get fluoride varnish?

Fluoride varnish is important for all children. This is very important for children who do not have fluoride in their water and eat a lot of food with sugar like cookies, candy, and cake.

The younger the child is when they begin varnish treatments, the better. Your baby should see the dentist for a checkup and fluoride as soon as the first tooth comes in. Fluoride can be painted on the teeth then and put on again every three to six months to make sure teeth stay healthy.

If you have a very young child who has not had their first dental visit, your medical doctor might apply varnish and recommend following up with a dentist.

## Ways to get fluoride

- From drinking fluoridated tap water
- When it is put onto the tooth's surface such as with fluoride containing toothpaste

## Other ways to get fluoride

- Over-the-counter fluoride mouthwashes
- Fluoride varnish application by your dentist

**To prevent cavities, it is best to get a little bit from all sources.**

### HEALTHY SMILE TIPS



Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.



Clean between your teeth daily with floss.



Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.



See your dentist at least twice a year for prevention and treatment of oral disease.