

# Pierce County Dentist Speaks Out Against Fluoridation

**Opinion by Dr. Debra Hopkins**

As a dentist who works in Pierce County, I take exception to the viewpoint made by fluoridation proponents that water fluoridation is good for all, without controversy. I oppose water fluoridation. I am very concerned about the welfare and health of my patients. I care deeply about the children and the elderly in my community.

I should. My own family makes up part of that community. I agree when proponents state that there is a link between oral disease and the health of the body as a whole. This is common-sense logic that is now proven in scientific literature. Our differences lie in the solution to dental decay and the devastating effects it can have.

The Washington State Dental Society and the American Dental Association support and have pushed for water fluoridation. Most dentists seem to buy into this position. However, these organizations conduct no research of their own. Dental organizations are not qualified to study the adverse health effects of water fluoridation. These studies need to be done by medical researchers, epidemiologists and toxicologists.

Recent studies have shown that tooth decay has decreased equally in both fluoridated and non-fluoridated communities. An article in the July 2000 issue of the Journal of the American Dental Association showed that fluoride's benefit comes from direct topical action on the teeth, not from ingesting or swallowing it.

Pierce County residents are repeatedly exposed to a select few dentists who endorse the ADA position without questioning the scientific validity of that position. There are studies linking water fluoridation to increased hip fracture in the elderly, bone cancer in young males, increased lead uptake in children, thyroid disease, hormonal disturbances, arthritis and harm to our environment. If the reader doubts their existence, simply go on the Web and type in "fluoride toxicity" or visit the Web site [www.slweb.org](http://www.slweb.org).

Dental fluorosis, the first sign of fluoride poisoning in the body, increases when fluoridation is implemented within a community--even the organizations that promote water fluoridation don't argue against this fact. Fluorosis is a condition where the enamel of the forming tooth is damaged by too much fluoride. This condition can be disfiguring and require costly cosmetic dentistry to correct, which is not offered to the poor on state assistance.

Children with diets deficient in protein and calcium are most vulnerable to dental fluorosis. Water fluoridation will adversely affect the poor children that the proponents claim it helps.

There are also environmental concerns about fluoride. People consume only one percent of the fluoridated water. Only half of that, or 0.5 percent of fluoridated water, is retained in the body. The rest goes down the toilet, waters our lawns, washes our cars and ends up in our environment. This is why a group of prominent EPA scientists has spoken out against this uncontrolled dumping of fluoride into our environment. Fluoride for ingestion is a prescription medication. The FDA has never approved as safe or effective any fluoride designed for ingestion. The only FDA-approved fluoride is for topical application, such as toothpaste.

There is a slim margin of safety with fluoride. People have died in Maryland and Alaska when equipment malfunctions allowed an overdose of fluoride to enter the public water supply. A warning on toothpaste tubes states: "Keep out of reach of children under 6 years of age. In case of accidental ingestion, seek professional assistance or contact a Poison Control Center immediately."

The March issue of the Journal of the American Dental Association (ADA) contains an article that documents a significantly lower rate of tooth decay among children who eat breakfast as well as those who eat more fruits and vegetables. Tooth decay is a disease of nutritional deficiency, not of fluoride deficiency. We need to rethink our fast-food philosophies and eat right, not try for a quick fix with a medication that will poison us all in the long run.

Fluoride is not really as safe and cost-effective as we are led to believe. But beyond this is another chilling aspect of the issue. The local government is about to mandate fluoridated water in Pierce County, a mass medication of people against their will. What about our rights to determine what medications we and our children will take? How did it come to this?

Well, patients are busy people who rely on doctors for information. Doctors are busy people who rely on information from their professional organizations through journals or spokespersons. There are those in the profession who have made a career out of promoting a certain position who aren't about to change the status quo. And there is an industry that will make huge profits by selling cities fluoride products to put in their water.

Fluoride is a prescription medication that should be dispensed by licensed medical/dental professionals, not dumped into our water supply by a city worker in a white protective suit.

Increasing the fluoride intake of the population without regard to established risk factors such as age, weight, kidney function, total water consumption and fluoride intake from other sources is hardly a health benefit. It is medical negligence.

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