



Preventing Tooth Decay Through Water Fluoridation

Public Health Problem

Cavities have declined dramatically in the U.S. population because of preventive strategies such as community water fluoridation, the use of fluoride toothpastes and mouth rinses, and the application of dental sealants (plastic coatings placed in the pits and grooves of molar teeth to prevent decay). Despite these gains, dental decay remains a significant problem for all age-groups, particularly for poor people and those of some racial and ethnic groups. Water fluoridation is the most cost-effective way to use fluoride to protect people from dental decay, with the average annual cost ranging from \$0.50 per person in communities with populations of 20,000 or more to \$3.17 in communities with fewer than 5,000 residents. The *Healthy People 2010* goal is for 75% of the U.S. population to receive fluoridated water. Currently, water fluoridation reaches about 66% of the U.S. population on community water supplies, or about 162 million Americans. About 100 million people in the United States were not receiving optimally fluoridated water as of 2000. In 1992, only 2% of Nevada's population on public water supplies received fluoridated water.

Program Example

Nevada has made significant progress in increasing the level of fluoride in drinking water to a level effective in preventing tooth decay. Clark County, which includes Las Vegas and Henderson and has a population of about 1 million people, began water fluoridation in 2000. This measure increased the fluoridation coverage in Nevada from about 28,000 to approximately 1 million residents, or two-thirds of the population on public water. Nevada is also strengthening its capacity to monitor oral diseases, extend water fluoridation, and provide school-based dental sealants.

Implications and Impact

Nevada's water fluoridation program demonstrates the importance of increasing people's access to fluoridated water as an effective means of decreasing tooth decay and its related pain and suffering, costs for treatment, and lost school and work days.

Contact Information

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