

# What is Fluoride?

- ❖ Fluoride is a natural protector of teeth & 17<sup>th</sup> most common element in the Earth's crust.
- ❖ Fluoride prevents tooth decay. Children need to swallow the right amount of fluoride when their teeth are forming to make them strong. Also, both children and adults need fluoride to contact the surface of their teeth on a frequent basis to keep them healthy.

## Why do we need Fluoride?

- ❖ Tooth decay is the most common childhood chronic disease, 5X more common than asthma.
- ❖ 60% of Bellingham's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders have this dental disease. Tooth decay is more severe in Bellingham than across the State.
- ❖ 38% of Whatcom County adults have lost a permanent tooth due to decay or disease. Poor oral health can have dramatic affects on the lives of people of all ages.

## Many Ways to Benefit From Fluoride

### Water Fluoridation

Community water fluoridation is changing the amount of natural fluoride in drinking water to prevent tooth disease. It improves community health just like adding Vitamin D to milk or iodine to salt.

Community water fluoridation is safe, effective and saves money. In Bellingham, it would cost about 44 cents per person per year to put fluoride in the water.

Now, only people who live in Lynden and the Lummi Reservation drink water with the right amount of fluoride in it. This is about 6% of Whatcom County residents. Also, about 5% of Whatcom County wells naturally contain the right amount of fluoride. Call the Whatcom County Health Department at 360-676-6724 to find out how to test your well for fluoride.

### Fluoride Varnish

Fluoride varnish is high strength fluoride painted directly onto teeth by a healthcare worker.

Fluoride varnish stops tooth decay and even heals mild decay. It is best to have fluoride varnish at least 2 times a year.

Ask your doctor or dentist about fluoride varnish for your child. Children may also receive fluoride varnish in some grade schools.

## Fluoride Supplements

Fluoride supplements are drops or chewable tablets given to children age 6 months to 16 years living in communities without the right amount of fluoride in the drinking water. Contact your doctor or dentist for more information.

## Fluoridated Toothpaste & Rinse

Toothpaste with fluoride reduces tooth decay in children by 15% to 30%. Most toothpastes have enough fluoride but some do not - make sure your toothpaste has enough fluoride in it.

Children under 6 years should use only a small amount of toothpaste (pea or rice sized amount). Swallowing a large amount of fluoridated toothpaste is a main cause of enamel fluorosis in children. Mild fluorosis can cause white spots on the teeth but does not have any negative health effects. White spots can also be the first sign of decay. If you see white or brown spots on your child's teeth contact your dentist or doctor.

Fluoride mouth rinse is available over the counter for use by persons over age 6.



*The Whatcom County Oral Health Coalition works to improve oral health for community members of all ages through prevention, education, and increased access to dental care*

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