



A Memo for Newspaper Editors

NOTE: The text below can be sent to newspaper editors to encourage them to write editorials or columns in support of community water fluoridation when the issue arises in a city or town. This memo is based on text that has been used successfully in multiple communities. Because many newspaper editors will not open attachments of files they haven't requested, this text should be copied and pasted directly into an email before you send it. You will need to fill in all of the highlighted areas with the appropriate information for your organization, your state, etc. Hyperlinks have been included because some editors might want to access the original sources.

As you will notice, this memo is written for use in a community where local officials have been asked to stop fluoridation. If your situation is different, please revise the opening paragraph accordingly. This memo should be sent to the editor and editorial page editor of the newspaper — and feel free to include all members of the editorial board if you can find their email addresses. Many newspaper websites include email or other contact information for editors. If you cannot find it, call the newspaper.

The [name of city/city council] has been asked to [start/stop] adding fluoride to the community's drinking water. The [name of organization or oral health coalition] is providing the [city council or water board] with a summary of the scientific evidence about community water fluoridation. We want to share this information with your newspaper in case you decide to write editorials or opinion columns about this topic.

WHAT IS FLUORIDATION?

Fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in nearly all water supplies but usually at a concentration that is too low to prevent tooth decay. This explains why so many U.S. communities have chosen to [fortify their water](#) with a small, additional amount of fluoride. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that fluoridated water reduces tooth decay by approximately [25 percent](#) over a person's lifetime.

The process of fluoridation has been practiced for [70 years](#). This strategy is not a silver bullet, but it is a crucial part of prevention. In [name of state], roughly [insert the correct %] of residents who are served by public water systems receive fluoridated water.

Fluoridation is one example of America's tradition of fortifying foods and beverages to protect human health. For example, [Vitamin D](#) is added to milk, [iodine](#) is added to salt, and [folic acid](#) is added to breads and cereals.

WHY DENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Although America's dental health has [improved](#) significantly in recent decades, tooth decay is the [most common](#) chronic disease of early childhood — five times more prevalent than asthma.

Research shows that children with dental problems are much more likely to [miss school](#), and teens with a recent toothache are four times more likely to struggle [academically](#).

Last year, a [CNBC story](#) pointed out one of the consequences for adults with unhealthy or missing teeth: “In America, most people — including employers — make instant judgments based on appearance, including someone’s smile and teeth.”

Fillings, crowns or other dental treatments can squeeze the household budget for many families. In fact, the [lifetime costs](#) for treating a single decayed molar can range from \$1,788 to even \$6,000. Clearly, prevention is the best way to avoid the pain, cost and other negative impacts of tooth decay. This is what makes fluoridation such an important strategy.

IS FLUORIDE TOOTHPASTE ENOUGH?

Opponents of fluoridation claim that fluoride only has a preventive effect when it’s applied topically, but the evidence says otherwise. Although regular tooth-brushing is important, numerous studies confirm that fluoridated water provides important, added protection against tooth decay.

Drinking fluoridated water works two ways. First, the fluoride that young children consume helps strengthen the enamel of their teeth even before they fully appear in the mouth. For people of all ages, drinking fluoridated water or beverages significantly [raises](#) the concentration of fluoride in saliva — enabling fluoride to be absorbed on the surface of tooth enamel and making it more resistant to decay. As the CDC [explains](#), fluoride in water “comes in contact with the teeth every time you drink tap water or beverages made from tap water, as well as foods prepared with tap water.” This regular, ongoing exposure to fluoride is crucial to protecting teeth from cavities.

The research supports this point. In 2013, after reviewing 161 fluoride-related studies, the U.S. Community Preventive Services Task Force [recommended](#) water fluoridation “based on strong evidence of effectiveness” in cavity reduction. The Task Force’s recommendations are considered the “gold standard” by leading [health](#) and [medical](#) officials.

It’s not an either-or choice. According to the [CDC](#): “Use of both fluoridated water and fluoridated toothpaste is recommended because fluoride in water and fluoride in toothpaste work differently to help prevent tooth decay.”

HOW FLUORIDATION SAVES MONEY

Ending water fluoridation might initially appear to be a way to save money, but the evidence shows that this health practice pays for itself in two ways. First, it saves taxpayers money by reducing the costs of dental care under state Medicaid programs. [Research](#) from Louisiana, New York and Texas has confirmed these savings.

Second, families save money because lower rates of tooth decay mean they spend less money on fillings, crowns or other dental treatments. Over a period of many years, dental expenses can be expensive for a middle-class or low-income family.

Compare these expenses with the low costs of fluoridation. For example, the annual per-person cost to maintain fluoridation in Milwaukee, Wisc. is approximately [63 cents](#). In Dallas, Tex., fluoridation costs only about [25 cents](#) per resident, per year.

A STRONG CONSENSUS

Fluoridated water's ability to prevent cavities has been [established](#) by a large and growing body of studies and research papers. In fact, few topics have been as [thoroughly studied](#) as fluoride and fluoridation.

This solid research is why the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [American Dental Association](#), the [Institute of Medicine](#) and other respected medical and health organizations endorse fluoridation. U.S. surgeons general — regardless of the president who appointed them — have consistently [supported](#) fluoridation. In 2013, a senior Defense Department official issued [an order](#) directing military bases of a minimum size to fluoridate their drinking water and pointed out that the armed forces has determined that fluoridation “helps to improve and sustain the military readiness and health of military personnel.”

The CDC [named](#) water fluoridation one of “10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.” In 2013, the deans of Harvard University's three leading health institutions [called](#) fluoridation “an effective and safe public health measure for people of all ages.” A 2002 study [concluded](#) that “water fluoridation is probably the most significant step we can take toward reducing the disparities in dental caries.”

THE SAFETY OF FLUORIDE

Since 1951, the National Research Council (NRC) has issued [five different reports](#) about fluoride or fluoridation — three of them since 1993. None of those reports raised health concerns about the fluoride concentration used for water fluoridation. Fluoride levels are regularly monitored by local water systems and [reported](#) to state officials.

Anti-fluoride activists often cite the NRC's 2006 report to raise fear about fluoride. This NRC report explored the possibility of health concerns in some areas of the U.S. where the *natural* fluoride levels in well water are far higher than the concentration used to fluoridate public water systems. The NRC itself [explained](#) that the conclusions in its report “do not apply at the lower water fluoride levels commonly experienced by most U.S. citizens.” In 2013, John Doull, the highly respected toxicologist who chaired the 2006 NRC committee, [stated](#) that he does not see “any valid scientific reason for fearing adverse health conditions from the consumption of water fluoridated at the optimal level.”

Excessive levels of fluoride can potentially have adverse health effects, but this is true of many minerals and vitamins, including [niacin](#) and [Vitamin D](#). Fluoridation is a well-

monitored process that does not expose Americans to concentrations high enough to harm someone's health.

Opponents of fluoridation call fluoride “toxic” but present no solid evidence of toxic effects. For example, opponents have attempted to link fluoridation with lower IQ scores in children by citing flawed studies from China and Iran. The typical fluoride concentration in these studies was [significantly higher](#) than the level used to fluoridate water in the U.S. Moreover, these studies failed to account for lead, arsenic or other factors that can affect IQs. (This is a crucial point because [arsenic](#) and [lead](#) contamination are significant problems in China.) The Harvard researchers who reviewed these studies publicly [distanced](#) themselves from the way that anti-fluoride groups have tried to spin the results. In 2014, a peer-reviewed study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found [no link](#) between fluoridated water and IQ scores.

The Toxicology Excellence for Risk Assessment, an independent U.S. research organization, [explains](#) that “medical scientists have agreed that small concentrations of fluoride have health benefits that vastly exceed any hypothetical health risk.” As a writer for *Scientific American* [observed](#) in 2013, fluoridation “has been rigorously tested as a public health measure” and “there is no evidence that a regulated amount of fluoride in our water is causing harm” to Americans. In 2014, the British government issued a [report](#) on fluoridation that concluded: “The report provides further reassurance that water fluoridation is a safe and effective public health measure.”

OPPONENTS LACK CREDIBILITY

Most local critics of fluoridation are sincere but have been influenced by websites or books that distort the scientific evidence. Many anti-fluoride websites sell [water filters](#), [books](#) or other [products](#) related to the controversy they try to generate.

The independent, non-partisan PolitiFact has investigated [three common arguments](#) that anti-fluoride activists make. All three of these claims were revealed to be false or deceptive.

Anti-fluoride leaders use the language of science to attack fluoridation, but a closer look at their messages reveals they misrepresent the research, leave out key facts and cherry-pick phrases out of context. For example, opponents [misrepresent](#) European policies with statements like this: “*Ninety-eight percent of Europe is fluoridation-free.*” This declaration ignores several [key facts](#) — water fluoridation reaches more than 13 million Europeans, salt fluoridation reaches more than 75 million people in Europe, and milk fluoridation and other fluoride programs reach millions of others.

Anti-fluoride activists circulate many “studies” that were poorly designed or were not appropriately peer-reviewed. One such study linked fluoride exposure to acts of crime, but it was written by someone with no identified scientific credentials who [admitted](#) he collected the crime stories “based on their content and on my intuition” instead of conducting a methodical search of the data.

Many opponents cite the website of the Fluoride Action Network (FAN) as the source for their views. This group lacks credibility:

- FAN’s website promotes a [conspiracy theory](#) connecting fluoride to scientists who worked on the atomic bomb in the 1940s. FAN ignores the fact that U.S. research on fluoride [began](#) several decades earlier.
- On its website, FAN has [praised](#) and posted [fluoride research](#) from a man who co-wrote [a book](#) claiming that HIV did *not* cause AIDS. FAN’s ideological nature is reflected by the fact that it belongs to a [coalition](#) that attacks childhood vaccines.
- In 2013, FAN [hired](#) Bill Hirzy less than a month after he [told a reporter](#) he was “embarrassed” to have submitted an anti-fluoride petition with the EPA (his former employer) that contained significant errors.

In 2012, the editors of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* met with FAN’s leader and another opponent and wrote an editorial [explaining](#) that “their arguments, no doubt sincere, aren’t based on much more than anecdote, conjecture and studies that aren’t particular relevant to the U.S. practice of community water fluoridation.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

For 70 years, drinking water in the U.S. has been fortified with fluoride, and the scientific evidence shows this practice has safely improved Americans’ health and well-being.

Children growing up today are far less likely than their grandparents were to experience rampant decay and lose their teeth. [\[Name of state or city\]](#) can take pride in knowing that its fluoridation policy has helped make that progress possible. Ending fluoridation would jeopardize that positive trend and impose a hidden “tax” on local residents because the need for and expense of dental treatments would increase in the community.

If you have any questions, please contact us:

[\[Name of contact\]](#)

[\[Phone number\]](#)

[\[Email address\]](#)