

QUESTION:

Are fluoride treatments really necessary for children?

ANSWER:

Dental caries, commonly known as tooth decay, is one of the top chronic childhood diseases in America. Fortunately, it is largely preventable regardless of where you live, how much money you make or your access to healthcare.

Dental caries form when bacteria in the mouth convert food particles into acid. The acid then attacks the tooth's hard outer surface called enamel. The breakdown of enamel results in a cavity. The use of fluoride is one way to prevent this from happening. According to Dr. Christopher Armento, owner of Red Barn Dental, drinking fluoridated water, brushing with fluoride toothpaste, or using other fluoridated dental products can raise the concentration of fluoride present in one's saliva from 100 to 1000 fold.

Fluoride works by binding to tooth enamel, which is made up of hydroxylapatite, a crystal composed of calcium, phosphorus, hydrogen and oxygen. By replacing the hydroxyl molecule with fluoride, the enamel becomes less susceptible to acid attack making it harder to dissolve tooth structure and cause decay.

Tooth decay, if untreated, can cause pain, school absences, difficulty concentrating, and poor appearance. These conditions decrease quality of life for children making it hard for them to focus on the day's events. The dental work necessary to remove the decay may also be a great expense for the parent or caretaker.

Often times parents are hesitant to use fluoridated products or deny fluoride application during their child's dental visit. Many parents



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are concerned that their child will develop fluorosis – the presence of white streaks and spots when too much fluoride is ingested. Fluorosis is common in very young children during tooth development but once a child reaches age 6 they are past the age that fluoride ingestion can cause fluorosis.

Dr. Armento encourages parents to establish a dental home for their children at an early age. He believes it is important so that parents can become educated on topics such as this. Fluoride application is an important part of preventive dentistry and will help maintain a healthy mouth, eliminate dental disease and decrease a child's need for extensive dental treatment in the future.

Community water fluoridation is another safe and effective way to promote oral health and decrease the incidence of tooth decay. New Jersey ranks 49th out of 50 states in its percentage of population that drinks fluoridated public water at the Center for Disease Control's recommended level of .7 part per million. Currently, only 14% of New Jersey residents receive fluoridated water from public drinking supplies. To find out whether your town has fluoridated water check out a list at www.nj.gov.

Any other information, Dr. Armento and his wife, Dr. Indelicato can be reached at their office, Red Barn Dental, located at 361 Kings Highway E, in Middletown. Feel free to call them at (732)671-1110 or visit the website redbarndental.com



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Christopher Armento, DMD
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