Water Fluoridation

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What is fluoride?
Fluoride is a natural mineral that helps harden the outer surface of teeth, called the enamel. It is currently present in drinking water and other products, such as toothpaste.

How does fluoride affect oral health?
Fluoride helps slow the rate at which cavities develop by rebuilding tooth enamel. Its presence in saliva allows it to form a protective layer on teeth that is more resistant to acids formed by plaque and bacteria.

What is the connection between fluoride and water?
Fluoride occurs naturally in water. Some water sources are naturally high in fluoride, while others are naturally low. Some cities that have more than what's required to effectively protect teeth choose to remove some fluoride, while other cities that don't have enough choose to add some.

What is community water fluoridation?
Water fluoridation is the controlled addition of fluoride into a public water supply and is commonly practiced around the United States. Consistent, long-term contact with fluoride has been scientifically linked to declines in dental caries, such as tooth decay and cavities. Currently, more than 204 million people in the United States (almost 73.9 percent of the population) are served by public water containing enough fluoride to protect teeth.

How did water fluoridation come about?
In the 1930s, dental scientists noticed low tooth decay rates among individuals whose water contained natural fluoride. Studies conducted during the 1940s and 1950s confirmed that when a small amount of fluoride is added into a community's water supply, decay rates among residents decreased.

What is the status of oral health in the community?
We often measure a community's health by looking at its youngest members. Nearly 25 percent of our children experience dental caries – more than hay fever or asthma. According to the Surgeon General, 51 million school hours are lost every year due to dental-related illnesses.

How can fluoridated water improve the community's oral health?
- Nearly all tooth decay can be prevented when water fluoridation is combined with dental sealants and other fluoride products, such as toothpaste and mouthwash.
- Community water fluoridation makes fluoride available to Americans regardless of age and socioeconomic status.
- Fluoride's effects are especially important for children during their early tooth development, but it also has positive effects throughout a lifetime.
- As Americans keep their natural teeth longer, fluoride will continue to be important in preventing tooth decay. Seniors are especially susceptible to tooth decay due to exposed root surfaces, which benefit from continued contact with fluoride.
- Fluoridated water also benefits our pets and can help reduce the need for professional cleanings and extractions.

What does water fluoridation cost?
- The average cost to fluoridate a large community's water supply is estimated to be $0.50 per person, per year.
- Over a lifetime, the cost of water fluoridation per person is typically less than the cost of one filling to repair one decayed tooth.
- For most cities, every $1 invested in community water fluoridation saves $38 in dental treatment costs due to lower health insurance premiums and taxes.

Just the facts, please.
- Fluoride is a natural mineral.
- Fluoride is currently present in Wichita's water, but there is not enough to prevent tooth decay.
- Proper brushing and flossing combined with water fluoridation improves oral health for everyone.
- .7 milligrams per liter is the recommended amount of fluoride in drinking water. This amount is safe and helpful for all ages.
- More than 70 percent of Americans drink water that has the recommended amount of fluoride.
- Small amounts of fluoride are in products such as toothpaste and mouthwash, but these alone do not provide the recommended amount. Water fluoridation is one way to get the recommended amount.