

## Community Water Supply Fluoridation

The Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA) is the voluntary professional association representing Ontario's registered dental hygienists. Dental hygienists are highly skilled in helping clients to attain and maintain optimum oral health. Clinical research has established a strong link between oral health and overall health. As members of the oral health care team, dental hygienists are responsible for client-centered professional treatment that helps to prevent periodontal (or gum) disease and dental caries (or cavities). Dental hygienists also focus on disease prevention.

Fluoride is a natural substance found in the earth's crust. It exists naturally in some water and food sources. Fluoride works by strengthening or remineralizing the outer layer of teeth (enamel) to prevent cavities from starting, to reduce the size and number of cavities, and to decrease tooth sensitivity. Children need fluoride protection while their teeth are developing. Adults also require fluoride since the possibility of root cavities (tooth decay in the roots of the teeth) increases with age. Water fluoridation is the best way to provide fluoride protection to a large number of people at low cost without the barrier of individual income or access to routine dental care. Where fluoride has been added to municipal water supplies, there has been a marked decline in tooth decay rates.

In its fact sheet on *Fluorides and Human Health*, Health Canada endorses the fluoridation of drinking water to prevent tooth decay. Furthermore, Health Canada goes on to state that "Many governments and health organizations, including Health Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the World Health Organization endorse the fluoridation of drinking water to prevent tooth decay." ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/alt\\_formats/cmcd-dcmc/pdf/fluor\\_e.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/alt_formats/cmcd-dcmc/pdf/fluor_e.pdf))

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research in its report entitled *Oral Health Research - From Tooth Decay to Dental Implants* states that "... experts agree that water fluoridation is one of the most effective public-health measures ever undertaken. During the last 30 years or so, dental caries in children has decreased significantly throughout the industrialized world - the visible benefit of improved prevention programs - especially fluoridation of municipal water. Despite much controversy at the outset of the practice, retrospective studies comparing municipalities with and without fluoridated water have demonstrated conclusively that fluoridation programs have noticeably lowered rates of dental cavities." ([www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/11199.html](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/11199.html))

With more than 50 years of extensive research that has consistently shown fluoride to be a safe, effective, and economical means of preventing and even reversing the early stages of tooth decay (dental caries) in all age groups, ODHA strongly supports fluoridation of community water supplies.