

## Fluoride for Oral Health: Information Sheet

### What is fluoride?

- Fluoride is a mineral found in soil, water (both fresh and salt) and various foods.

### How does fluoride prevent tooth decay?

- Fluoride has a positive effect on oral health by making teeth more resistant to decay. Fluoride can also prevent or even reverse tooth decay that has started.

### Where do I get the fluoride that prevents tooth decay?

- Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife have added fluoride to the municipal drinking water to adjust levels from the naturally occurring level to meet the optimal level of 0.7 mg/L for prevention of tooth decay.
- Fluoride toothpaste is the most commonly available source of fluoride.
- Fluoride varnish or mouth rinse is another way to get the oral health benefits of fluoride.

### Are there any health risks associated with fluoride?

- Fluoride can be toxic if ingested in extreme quantities. For example, fluoride toxicity may occur when >5mg per 1 kg of body weight is ingested. The average single dose fluoride varnish application contains 5 mg. and the average pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste contains 0.3mg.
- Fluoride toothpaste, varnish and mouth rinses are considered topical applications and contain fluoride well within the safe level.
- Scientific studies have not found any credible link between water fluoridation and adverse health effects.

### What is dental fluorosis?

- Dental fluorosis is a rare occurrence where higher than optimal amounts of fluoride ingested in early childhood, before the age of four, and results in small white specks appearing on a child's teeth. This is purely cosmetic and does not hurt the tooth.

nthssa.ca

### **Should I be using fluoridated toothpaste with my child?**

Yes, especially in communities without fluoride added to the drinking water.

- For children from **birth to 3 years of age**, the child's teeth should be brushed by an adult using a minimal amount (**grain of rice size**) of fluoride toothpaste.
- For children from **3 to 6 years of age**, only a small amount (**pea size**) of fluoride toothpaste should be used. Children in this age group should be assisted by an adult in brushing their teeth.

### **Why do young children need to be assisted or supervised with tooth brushing?**

- Young children are still learning how to spit and may swallow toothpaste when they are brushing, which may increase their exposure to fluoride.
- An adult needs to ensure that an appropriate amount of toothpaste is used, that the child spits out the toothpaste rather than swallows it, and that the teeth are cleaned effectively.

### **What is water fluoridation?**

- Water fluoridation is the process of adding fluoride to a municipal drinking water supply to bring the level of fluoride to the optimal for preventing tooth decay.
- In the NWT, there are three communities with fluoridated drinking water: Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife.

### **Why is fluoride added to the public drinking water if it is available in other ways?**

- Fluoride is added to municipal drinking water to protect all members of the community from tooth decay. Community water fluoridation is a safe and effective way of preventing tooth decay for the population as a whole rather than individually.

### **Who watches the fluoride levels in the drinking water?**

- There are three GNWT departments that share responsibility for NWT Drinking Water: Municipal and Community Affairs, Health and Social Services, and Public Works and Services.
- In the three NWT communities with fluoride drinking water, fluoride levels are monitored daily to ensure fluoride levels are within the recommended concentration.
- In conjunction with the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality, the NWT Chief Public Health Officer has recommended the maximum fluoride concentration of 0.7 mg/L for prevention of tooth decay.

*Une version française de ce document est disponible.*