

https://buffalonews.com/opinion/another-voice-buffalo-parents-need-to-make-sure-their-children-get-enough-fluoride/article_b8eedc50-b47d-11ed-bc38-e37341150569.html

Another Voice: Buffalo parents need to make sure their children get enough fluoride

Stephen Turkovich, Sarah Ventre and Bridget Walsh

Feb 26, 2023

SUBSCRIBE: \$1 for 3 months

February is recognized as Children's Dental Health Month, but this year's observance takes on special meaning in New York State after **the recent, surprise news** that drinking water in Buffalo has not been fluoridated since 2015. This disturbing discovery reminds us of the need to raise awareness of how fluoride prevents tooth decay.

Tooth decay is the **most common chronic disease** of children. Pediatricians see firsthand how the impact of poor dental health goes far beyond the mouth. Research shows that children with dental pain are **three times more likely** to be absent from school and **four times more likely** to earn lower grades.

People are also reading...

- 1 **Jemal's firm forced to redo improper work on historic Fruit Belt house**
 - 2 **Nebraska cheerleader competes by herself at state competition, but crowd doesn't let her feel alone**
 - 3 **Two men arrested in the Southtowns after chase and search**
 - 4 **Mike Harrington: A total mismatch of a first period took all the vigor out of Sabres-Leafs rivalry renewal**
-

Fluoride is a mineral found naturally in lakes, rivers and other water supplies. Some communities have enough natural fluoride to reach the level proven to reduce the rate of tooth decay **by 25% for children and adults**. Most communities must add a little more fluoride to their water to reach this level.

Until recently, dental professionals and public health officials in Buffalo had assumed the city's water system was properly fluoridated. The disclosure that this isn't the case shocked local health officials, pediatricians, dentists and parents – and for good reason.

The news from Buffalo might have prompted some New Yorkers to wonder: “Is fluoridated water needed if you brush with a fluoride toothpaste?” It turns out that *both* of those forms of fluoride are needed to prevent tooth decay.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that fluoride toothpaste and fluoridated water “provide **important and complementary benefits**.” So what happens when a city stops adding fluoride? Spoiler alert: It's bad news for teeth, especially the developing teeth of children.

A recent study looked at what happened to children's teeth after a city stopped adding fluoride to its tap water. After fluoridation ended in Juneau – Alaska's capital city – the average costs for treating children's cavities **jumped by 47%** in nine years. By contrast, the treatment costs for children in continuously fluoridated Anchorage rose only 5% in the same period. In Juneau, the impact was the worst for preschool-age kids.

There is no reason to believe that Juneau children stopped brushing their teeth after water fluoridation ended. In fact, one might have expected parents to make brushing more of a priority afterward. Nonetheless, children there needed a lot more fillings and other types of treatment. Clearly, fluoride toothpaste was not enough.

Pediatricians want patients to be as healthy as possible, from teeth to toes. Fluoride is an important part of protecting those growing teeth from decay. Now that the city's water does not contain fluoride, Buffalo parents should speak with their children's

pediatrician or dentist about the best way to continue that protection.

Together, we can make sure Buffalo's kids have healthy smiles.

Stephen Turkovich, MD, is President, John R. Oishei Children's Hospital; Sarah Ventre, MD, MPH, is a pediatrician, Niagara Street Pediatrics, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at University at Buffalo; and Bridget Walsh, MPH, is Senior Health Policy Analyst, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.