



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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HEALTH BULLETIN

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Local Public Health Officials Support Fluoridation By Dr. Rama Khalsa and Dr. David McNutt

Public recognition of February as Children's Dental Health month has helped to highlight the critical attention oral health deserves to have in our community. Dental disease has been identified as the number one unmet health need for Santa Cruz County children in a report prepared by the First 5 Commission.

Recently, in school-based dental screenings of Santa Cruz County children, 77% of students had untreated dental cavities, and over 20% had abscessed teeth.

Oral disease is currently the most untreated childhood disease in our country. Many other childhood diseases- for example, measles, mumps, and whooping cough- are well managed, or have been nearly eliminated by aggressive prevention programs.

But, oral disease has remained unchecked.

Poor oral health affects many aspects of our lives and it is not a minor annoyance. School children who suffer the pain of decay have less learning and concentration ability. Nationwide, children with oral health problems miss almost 52 million school hours annually. Schools lose financial assistance when children need dental treatment or are home with acute pain.

It is important that our community grant oral health the attention it deserves in order to elect the kinds of systemic solutions that can greatly reduce dental disease, such as improving access to dental care and prevention.

Planning for our community's dental health affords us the opportunity to invest in long term dental disease prevention strategies. Effective public health strategies require an investment in prevention as well as treatment. Treatment is not enough to ensure dental health for the community's children. Dental treatment is extremely costly and publicly funded programs can serve only the most critical cases.

Community water fluoridation is the vanguard of effective dental disease prevention. Cavities are, in fact, a disease that can be prevented or minimized by drinking water that is fluoridated at an optimal level. State-of-the-art equipment and highly trained water engineers within a community's water system monitor this optimal level.

Fluoridation remains the most equitable and cost-effective of all community based cavity preventive methods. It benefits all age groups and all socioeconomic groups,

including the lowest, which has the highest number of cavities and is least able to afford preventive and restorative services.

Not only do community members benefit greatly because of cost savings resulting directly and indirectly from a community's decision to fluoridate, but they also benefit because of their improved oral health. Typically, cavity rates decline by 30 to 50 percent after communities start or continue water fluoridation.

Fluoridation has more than 55 years of credible research and practical experience; it has been shown over and over again to safely and effectively prevent dental cavities in children and adults. Fluoridation has been called, "one of the 'four pillars' of public health" along with pasteurization of milk, water purification, and immunizations and vaccinations.

The Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency (HSA) has long been a vocal and strong proponent of community water fluoridation, as has every responsible public health organization in this nation. Numerous health organizations support the health benefits of fluoridation, including the American Dental Association, The American Public Health Association, the American Medical Association, and the US Public Health Service.

We at the Health Services Agency are honored to serve a community that prides itself on quality of life and a healthy environment to raise a family. We invite our community

to become more educated about oral health. Please visit our web site, www.santacruzhealth.org for more information about fluoridation and dental health issues. HSA regrets the suffering in our community due to poor oral health and we will continue to work diligently to ensure better oral health for everyone in our community.