THE BASICS

What is fluoride?
Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in water & food.

How am I exposed to fluoride?
Water & food are natural sources of fluoride. People also receive fluoride through dental products such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, & fluoride supplements. Many communities also add fluoride to drinking water.

What are the health benefits of fluoride?
Fluoride is proven to protect against tooth decay & promote overall dental health for adults & children. There has been a dramatic decline in tooth decay during the past 65 years due to the addition of controlled levels of fluoride in public drinking water.

Additional & Source Information:
Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry
www.atsdr.cdc.gov
American Dental Association
www.ada.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov
The Guide to Community Preventive Services
www.thecommunityguide.org
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
www.niehs.nih.gov
National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov
World Health Organization
www.who.int/en/

FLUORIDE

What is community water fluoridation?
Many communities add fluoride to the drinking water to promote dental health & reduce tooth decay. This practice is known as community water fluoridation. The safety & effectiveness of fluoride at levels used in community water fluoridation has been thoroughly documented by scientific & public health organizations. The decision whether or not to add fluoride to drinking water is made at the state or local level. If you have questions about whether your community has fluoridated drinking water, contact your water utility provider. If your water comes from a private well, you can have well water tested by contacting your state water certification officer.

Is fluoride in bottled water?
Bottled water that is labeled “de-ionized,” “purified,” or “distilled” has been treated in such a way that it contains no or only trace amounts of fluoride, unless fluoride is specifically listed as an added ingredient. Other products, such as “spring water,” can contain fluoride that is added or naturally present in the original water source. The FDA sets limits for fluoride in bottled water based on several factors, including the source of the water.

Are there adverse health risks to excessive fluoride exposure?
Children ages 8 & younger have an increased chance of developing dental fluorosis due to excessive exposure to fluoride, which can have a greater impact while teeth are still in the formative phases. Dental fluorosis is a change in the appearance of the tooth’s enamel & varies from very mild to severe. Ninety-two percent of dental fluorosis cases in the U.S. are considered mild. In adults, excessive consumption of fluoride over a lifetime may increase the likelihood of bone fractures or skeletal fluorosis (effects on bone leading to pain & tenderness). Severe skeletal fluorosis is rare in the U.S.

If your family receives water from an optimally fluoridated community water system & you follow guidelines in your child’s tooth brushing, it is highly unlikely that your child is receiving too much fluoride. Questions specific to your own child should be discussed with your dentist or pediatrician.

Tooth Brushing Tips:
• Begin using toothpaste with fluoride when your child is 2 years old.
• All fluoridated toothpastes that can be purchased without a prescription are safe & effective for ages 2 & older.
• Only use a pea-sized amount of paste.
• Encourage your child to spit out the toothpaste rather than swallow it.

Infant Formula:
All formulas contain some fluoride, but these concentrations are very low. At normal consumption amounts, infant formula alone does not contain fluoride at levels higher than the daily upper limit established by the Institute of Medicine. In liquid or powdered formula concentrate, the majority of fluoride comes from the water used to mix the formula. Some parents may choose to use bottled water.

This factsheet is published by the Center in Molecular Toxicology at Vanderbilt University with funding from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (P30 ES00267).