

# Smilematters

## PATIENT FACT SHEET

### Fluoride Is Nature's Cavity Fighter

Sixty years ago, Grand Rapids became the world's first city to adjust the level of fluoride in its water supply. Since that time, fluoridation has dramatically improved the oral health of tens of millions of Americans. Community water fluoridation is the single most-effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay. In fact, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention proclaimed community water fluoridation as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.

When fluoride is used in small amounts on a routine basis, it helps to prevent tooth decay. It encourages "remineralization," a strengthening of weak areas on the teeth, which are the beginning of cavity formation.

Michigan continues to lead the way, as more than 86 percent of Michigan's citizens who are served by public water systems enjoy the benefits of water fluoridation. Throughout the country, approximately 170 million people, over two-thirds of the population, are served by public water systems that are fluoridated.

Fluoride occurs naturally in water and in many different foods, as well as in dental products such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, gels, varnish and supplements. Fluoride is most effective when combined with a healthy diet and good oral hygiene.

Studies conducted throughout the past 60 years have consistently indicated that fluoridation of community water supplies is safe and effective in preventing dental decay in both children and adults. It is the most-efficient way to prevent one of the most common childhood diseases — tooth decay is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever in 5- to 17-year olds.

Fluoride continues to be effective in reducing

#### Fluoridation Quick Facts

- Simply by drinking water, people can benefit from fluoridation's cavity protection whether they are at school, home or work. Water fluoridation benefits everyone, especially those without access to regular dental care.
- Community water fluoridation is the single most-effective public health measure to prevent dental decay.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention proclaimed community water fluoridation as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.
- If you rely on bottled water for a majority of the water you drink, make sure you get enough fluoride from other sources, as the majority of bottled waters do not contain optimal levels of fluoride.

tooth decay by 20 to 40 percent, even in an era with widespread availability of fluoride from other sources, such as fluoride toothpaste.

Not only is fluoride a safe and effective way to reduce tooth decay, it is also very economical. The average cost for a community to fluoridate its water is estimated to range from approximately 50 cents a year per person in large communities to approximately \$3 a year per person in small communities. For most cities, every \$1 invested in water fluoridation saves \$38 in dental treatment costs.