

98-08

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Community Water Fluoridation

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recognizes the public health benefits of community water fluoridation as a safe and cost-effective measure for preventing tooth decay and encourages communities to fluoridate water systems at levels optimal for protection against tooth decay.

NACCHO supports the following policies and actions:

- Increased federal, state, and local resources to support public health infrastructure to ensure safe and effective practices, training, monitoring, and technical assistance, and promotion to maintain and expand community water fluoridation programs.
- Federal, state, local, and private support and efforts to adjust community water systems at the optimal fluoride level recommended by the US Department of Health and Human Services (0.7 milligrams per liter).<sup>1,2</sup>
- Federal and private support for continued research on the benefits derived from fluoridation of community water systems and other measures to deliver fluoride to communities.
- Dedicate federal, state, and local resources for local health departments to educate health professionals, policymakers, and communities about the safety, benefits, and cost-effectiveness of community water fluoridation.
- Federal, state, and local policies that prevent, mitigate, or eliminate environmental burdens that disproportionately affect the health of some populations over others.<sup>3</sup>

#### Justification

In the United States, tooth decay is one of most common chronic diseases in children and adults.<sup>4</sup> Tooth decay disproportionately burdens some populations over others. High prevalence of untreated tooth decay are found among individuals with lower incomes and less education, black and Hispanic adults, and younger adults.<sup>5</sup> Fluoride is a naturally occurring element, and adjusting the fluoride concentration of community water systems is the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay and to improve oral health throughout one's lifespan.<sup>6</sup> Community water fluoridation is a public health measure that benefits individuals of all ages and socioeconomic groups, especially those without access to regular dental care.<sup>7</sup> There is evidence that communities with community water fluoridation have substantially lower prevalence of tooth decay and no evidence that community water fluoridation results in severe dental fluorosis.<sup>8</sup>



The US Department of Health and Human Services recommends the fluoride concentration for all public drinking water be adjusted to 0.7 milligrams per liter for effective prevention of tooth decay.<sup>9</sup> Recent statistics show that the percentage of the United States population served by public water systems who receive water with optimal fluoride levels for preventing tooth decay increased from 62 percent in 1992 to 74.6 percent, or 210 million persons, in 2012.<sup>10</sup> As of 2012, 44 of the 50 largest cities in the United States adjusted the fluoride concentration of their water systems at the recommended optimal level.<sup>11</sup>

In the United States, community water fluoridation has been recognized as one of 10 great achievements in public health of the twentieth century. It is an ideal public health method because it is effective, eminently safe, and inexpensive and this method requires no cooperative effort or direct action and does not depend on access or availability of professional services.<sup>12</sup>

The use of community water fluoridation continues to be one of the most cost-effective prevention measures to reduce the burden of tooth decay in the population. Community water fluoridation for an individual's lifetime costs about as much as one dental filling. However, studies show that it prevents tooth decay by 18 to 40 percent tooth decay.<sup>13</sup> Community water fluoridation is equitable because the entire population benefits regardless of financial resources. Fluoridation helps to lower cost of dental care and helps residents retain their teeth throughout their lifetime.<sup>14</sup>

## **References**

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7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. (May 2000).
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11. American Dental Association. Water Fluoridation Status of the 50 Largest Cities in the United States. Retrieved May 27, 2014 from [http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Member%20Center/FILES/Fluoridation\\_Status\\_of\\_50\\_Largest\\_U.S.\\_Cities.aspx](http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Member%20Center/FILES/Fluoridation_Status_of_50_Largest_U.S._Cities.aspx)
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13. *Ibid.*
14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Preventing Tooth decay with Community Programs. Retrieved May 27, 2014 from [http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/dental\\_caries.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/dental_caries.htm)

## **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Environmental Health Committee*

*Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors  
September 23, 1998  
Updated July 2009  
Updated July 2014*