GIVE YOUR CHILD A HEALTHY MOUTH WITH FLUORIDE

Did you know that drinking tap water can help prevent cavities? Water that contains fluoride makes teeth strong and can even reverse or heal early tooth decay. Marylanders are lucky, because 94% of households served by the public water supply receive fluoridated water.

Fluoride is nature’s way to fight cavities. It is a common element found in soil and in fresh and ocean waters. For more than 75 years, dentists and scientists have known that fluoride makes teeth strong, more resistant to decay, and is safe to use.

Dental caries (cavities), the most common chronic childhood disease, can cause pain and serious health problems. It can affect your child’s ability to eat, speak, learn, and play. You can prevent cavities by caring for your mouth and your child's mouth every day with fluoride.

Unlike sugary beverages that can lead to cavities (such as juice, sports drinks or soda), drinking water that contains fluoride helps protect your teeth. The fluoride in water prevents tooth decay just like the fluoride in toothpaste. Best of all, you can get it from the tap!

Most bottled water does not contain fluoride. It is healthier and less expensive to fill a container with tap water than to purchase bottled water. You can still reap the benefits of fluoridated water by filtering your tap water at home, as most household filters will not remove fluoride. If you must use bottled water, use Nursery Water (pink label), as it contains fluoride.

If you are on well water or your water is not fluoridated, and you want to make sure your child is getting appropriate amounts of fluoride to prevent tooth decay, talk to your dentist or physician who can prescribe fluoride for your child in the form of drops or tablets.

You can also help keep you and your child’s mouth healthy by brushing twice a day (especially before bed) with toothpaste that contains fluoride. Most common toothpaste brands contain fluoride, but it is best to check the ingredients to make sure. The amount of fluoride toothpaste that should be used to brush your child’s teeth varies depending on their stage of development. If your child is under age 3, use a smear – about the size of a grain of rice. For children ages 3 to 6, use a pea-size amount. After brushing, spit – do not rinse.

Another way to strengthen teeth and prevent or stop tooth decay is with fluoride varnish, a protective coating that is painted on the teeth by a dental or medical provider. It works best if applied twice a year. Fluoride varnish is a safe and effective way to strengthen teeth and and can be used on babies from the time they get their first teeth.

Your child should have regular dental visits twice a year. Ask the dentist if your child is getting enough fluoride. If your child’s teeth need more fluoride to stay healthy, a dentist can prescribe fluoride in a stronger toothpaste or mouth rinse.

Learn more about fluoride and how to give your child a healthy mouth for life at [healthyteethhealthykids.org.](http://www.healthyteethhealthykids.org)