

The other sports are just sports.  
Baseball is a love. ~ Bryant Gumbel, 1981

## Is Fluoride in Toothpaste Safe for my Child?

The use of fluoride toothpaste has been recommended for more than 50 years to prevent and control dental decay, especially in children. Unfortunately, the lack of information regarding the safety and efficacy of fluoride for children younger than 6 years has resulted in inconsistent messaging in the dental community and also resulted in concerns amongst parents. The main issue is that children younger than 5 years of age tend to swallow more toothpaste while brushing as opposed to older children who are able to spit out the toothpaste more thoroughly after brushing. The ADA Council recently released their new guideline and recommendations on fluoride use in toothpaste. With all of the information, and misinformation, available to us over the Internet through social media,

blogs, and alarmists, I felt that I should present the facts on this controversial subject as a dentist, and as a father, so that parents can make the right decision for their families.

Recommendations for the use of fluoride with infants and children have continually been modified over the years in order to maximize the cavity-preventing effect and minimize the risks. The main point I want parents to understand is that the amount of fluoride in toothpastes and dental rinses will **not** cause harm to your children, especially when used topically.

The only risk that is possible is what is called dental fluorosis. **Dental fluorosis** is a defect of tooth enamel caused by too much fluoride intake during the first 8 years of life. Excessive exposure to high concentrations of fluoride during tooth development (during childhood) can result in tiny white streaks or specks in the enamel of the tooth in mild cases of dental fluorosis. In severe cases of dental fluorosis, the tooth has more evident discoloration and brown markings, but this is rare. Although fluorosis can be cosmetically treated, the damage to the enamel is permanent. So why do we take this chance with fluoride in our toothpastes and drinking water?

### **Fluoride protects the teeth in two ways:**

- **Protection from demineralization** - when bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars they produce acid. This acid can erode tooth enamel and damage our teeth. Fluoride can protect teeth from demineralization that is caused by the acid.

- **Remineralization** - if there is already some damage to teeth caused by acid, fluoride accumulates in the demineralized areas and begins strengthening the enamel, a process called remineralization.

Fluoride is extremely useful in preventing cavities and

making teeth stronger, which is why it is highly recommended as a topical supplement in oral hygiene and has been added to the drinking water. The ADA says that "water that has been fortified with fluoride is similar to fortifying milk with Vitamin D, table salt with iodine, and bread and cereals with folic acid." The old regiment of recommended Fluoride toothpaste was a "pea-sized" amount used starting at 2 years of age.

### **New Recommended Fluoride Toothpaste Use in Children**

- **Children younger than 3 years: Parents should begin brushing children's teeth as soon as teeth come in with fluoride toothpaste of no more than a smear or size of grain of rice.**

- **Children 3 to 6 years: Parents should dispense a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Brush teeth twice per day (morning and night). **\*\*Supervise children's brushing to minimize swallowing of toothpaste\*\*****

As a father of three, I completely understand and respect every parent's choice to protect their children and do the very best to keep them healthy. A majority of the information regarding the risk of fluoride use do not have supporting evidence and are referencing the ingestion of extremely large amounts of this mineral. This is not the case with fluoride toothpastes and rinses. Fluoride is very safe for your child in the proper amounts, and will strengthen their tooth enamel and help prevent tooth decay. All of my children have used fluoridated toothpastes and rinses since they formed their first teeth and this is what I recommend to all of my patients as well.

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