



## Fluoride for Children: FAQs

### Fluoride from drinking water

(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Water-Fluoridation.aspx>) and other sources like toothpaste and mouth rinse can help prevent tooth decay

(<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/pages/Preventing-Tooth-Decay-in-Children.aspx>) (dental caries for cavities) and make your child's teeth stronger.

Here are some common questions parents ask about how fluoride helps protect children's oral health.



### Q: Why do children need fluoride?

**A:** Fluoride is a natural mineral that can slow or stop cavities from forming. Bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars and make acid that can harm the outer layer of the tooth (enamel). Fluoride protects teeth from damage and helps rebuild the enamel. Many communities have added fluoride to the tap water to help fight cavities. Children should drink plenty of water and brush with toothpaste that has fluoride in it.

Drinking tap water protects kids' teeth!



### Q: Is fluoridated water safe for my children?

**A:** Yes. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Dental Association, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agree that water fluoridation (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Water-Fluoridation.aspx>) is safe and works to prevent tooth decay (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/pages/Preventing-Tooth-Decay-in-Children.aspx>). Community water fluoridation has been shown to reduce tooth decay by 25%.

### Q: When should my child start using fluoride toothpaste?

**A:** The AAP recommends using a "smear" of fluoride toothpaste twice a day when the first tooth appears and until age 3. Once your child has turned 3, a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste can be used.

## Q: What if we live in a community where the water is not fluoridated? What can we do?

**A:** Check with your local water utility agency to find out ([https://nccd.cdc.gov/doh\\_mwf/Default/Default.aspx](https://nccd.cdc.gov/doh_mwf/Default/Default.aspx)) if your water has fluoride in it. If it doesn't or you have well water, ask your pediatrician or dentist if your child is at high risk for cavities. The doctor may recommend you buy fluoridated water or give you a prescription for fluoride drops or tablets for your child.

## Q: Should my child get fluoride varnish?

**A:** Yes. Fluoride varnish (</English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Fluoride-Varnish-What-Parents-Need-to-Know.aspx>) is used to help prevent or slow down tooth decay. Your pediatrician will apply the varnish starting when your baby is 6 months old at well-child visits (</English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Well-Child-Care-A-Check-Up-for-Success.aspx>). It is painted on the top and sides of each tooth and hardens quickly. Then, it is brushed off after 4 to 12 hours. It is recommended that children have varnish applied 2 to 4 times per year until they are 5 years old.

## Q: What should I know about fluoride if I am breastfeeding or using infant formula?

**A:** When they are younger than 6 months old, breastfed (<http://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx>) babies and babies fed infant formula do not need fluoride supplements or formula mixed with water than is fluoridated. It is safe to use fluoridated water to mix (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Formula-Form-and-Function-Powders-Concentrates-and-Ready-to-Feed.aspx>) the formula if your baby is younger than 6 months old, but there is a small risk of "fluorosis." (See more details, below.) Ask your pediatrician (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/decisions-to-make/Pages/Finding-a-Pediatrician.aspx>) or dentist (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-a-Pediatric-Dentist.aspx>) if you need more advice.

If you prefer not to use fluoridated water with formula before your baby's first tooth emerges, you can:

- Use bottled or purified water that has no fluoride with the formula.
- Use ready-to-feed formula that does not need water to be added.

## Q: What is dental fluorosis, and will fluoridated water mixed with infant formula increase the risk?

**A:** Fluorosis usually appears as very faint white streaks on the teeth. Often it is only noticeable by a dental expert during an exam. Mild fluorosis is not painful and does not affect the function or health of the teeth.

Although using fluoridated water to prepare infant formula might increase the risk of dental fluorosis, most cases are mild.

(<http://www.ada.org/5576.aspx?currentTab=1>)

Once your child's adult teeth come in (usually around age 8), the risk of developing fluorosis is over.

## More Information

- Good Oral Health Starts Early (</English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Brushing-Up-on-Oral-Health-Never-Too-Early-to-Start.aspx>)
- Fluoride a Powerful Tooth to Prevent Tooth Decay (</English/news/Pages/Fluoride.aspx>)

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