

Are my young children getting too much fluoride?

January 7 2011, By STEPHANIE NANO , Associated Press

(AP) -- Could your youngster be getting [too much fluoride](#)? U.S. health officials think some young kids might be. They want to change the recommended levels of fluoride in drinking water, primarily to prevent a condition called fluorosis.

Some questions and answers:

Q: What is fluorosis?

A: It's a dental condition that can result from consuming too much of the mineral [fluoride](#). It mostly results in tiny white flecks or streaks on teeth. In extreme cases, it causes discoloration and pitting of the tooth enamel.

Q: Who can get it?

A: Only children under 8. That's when permanent teeth are developing under the gums. Once those teeth emerge, the enamel is no longer susceptible to fluorosis.

Q: Is it serious?

A: In most cases, no. The majority of cases are mild, and barely noticeable. But it has become more common. An estimated 41 percent of kids 12 to 15 have it. It's a cosmetic condition and can be treated with whitening or other procedures.

Q: How do you get too much fluoride?

A: Water, soft drinks and juices are the main source of fluoride in the United States, according to health officials. Some [water supplies](#) contain natural fluoride; it's added to the drinking water in many communities to prevent [tooth decay](#). Other sources are [toothpaste](#), mouthwashes, gels and supplements.

Q: Are there ways to prevent fluorosis?

A: Read the toothpaste label and limit the amount of toothpaste used by kids under 6. They should only use a pea-sized amount. Watch them brush and make sure they spit out the toothpaste - not swallow it.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommends consulting a dentist before using fluoride toothpaste for a child younger than 2.

Check the fluoride level in your water supply. Public water systems are required to provide annual reports that include fluoride levels. Check their website or the CDC's My Water's Fluoride at apps.nccd.cdc.gov/MWF/Index.asp

Health officials say if the level is above 2 milligrams per liter, consider other sources of [drinking water](#) for young children. If there isn't enough, fluoride supplements might be considered.

More information: CDC: tinyurl.com/2ep8743

Fluorosis: tinyurl.com/fluorosis

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