

PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY THROUGH COMMUNITY WATER PROGRAMS

Overcoming barriers to maintaining water fluoridation achieved through collaboration

Public Health Problem

- Community water fluoridation is one of the most effective strategies for preventing tooth decay.
- Fluoridation and the management of fluoridation programs is an important part of community infrastructure to improve health.
- Unfounded concern about the safety of fluoridation is often a barrier to initiating or keeping water fluoridation at the best levels for preventing tooth decay.

Program

- The Alaska Oral Health Program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, worked with water operators, state drinking water programs, and tribal health programs to collect data for a water fluoridation reporting system.
- Program staff educated the states' water plant operators about fluoridation guidelines and made them aware of Alaska Oral Health Program goals.
- Water fluoridation training was provided through the collaborative efforts of the Alaskan Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Alaska Rural Water Association, the Alaska Water Waste Management Association, and the Alaska Oral Health Program.
- When political leaders expressed concern about the relationship of local cancer rates to fluoride and chlorine in the water supply in Craig, Alaska, the state Dental Officer provided the local operator with information on fluoridation safety and contacted local specialists and providers to assist in providing community leaders with accurate data.

Impact

- For the first time, 24 Alaskan communities were recognized for maintaining optimal levels of fluoridation throughout the year, a significant step toward preventing dental decay for local residents.
- Members of the coalition of groups listed above worked together to allay the fears of the mayor, city council members, and citizens of Craig, Alaska about the safety of water fluoridation and saved the water fluoridation program in that community.
- This success highlights the value of both state capacity for the management of fluoridation and the collaboration between agencies in the state oral health coalition.

Contact

Brad Whistler

Alaska Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Health

907-465-8628

brad_whistler@health.state.ak.us

