



The 5 Ws of Community Water Fluoridation

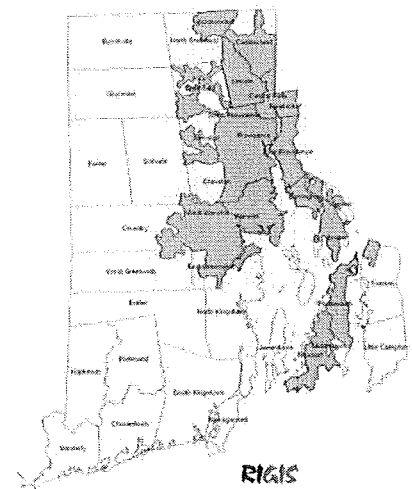
WHAT – Community water fluoridation (CWF) is the process of adding fluoride to local drinking water. Fluoride is the 13th most abundant element and found naturally in all water in various amounts. It was discovered in the 1940s that fluoride in small concentrations helps prevent tooth decay. Now considered one of the top 10 public health achievements of the 20th Century, CWF moves us toward achieving social equity in oral health by delivering fluoride to people of all ages and backgrounds who live in a community. The current recommended fluoride level is 0.7 mg/L with a range of 0.6-1.0 mg/L.

WHO – CWF serves almost 850,000 Rhode Islanders of all ages, in 83.2% of public water systems.

WHERE – CWF is found in public water systems in four of Rhode Island's five counties. In the map to the right, the shaded areas represent tap water which contains the recommended level of fluoride for decay prevention.

WHEN – Fluoridation is important during all phases of a person's life. It is beneficial for tooth development in young children, and, as a mineral in saliva, bathes teeth during the day to help them resist demineralization. Fluoride incorporates in the enamel to make teeth stronger and prevents decay.

WHY – We want all Rhode Islanders to have healthy teeth. CWF is an effective measure that does not require people to do something special or make any extra effort. CWF saves on dental costs. On average, over \$30.00 is saved per child on dental costs in communities that have recommended fluoride levels compared to those that do not. A recent assessment showed that Westerly, which does not have CWF, had a 28% greater proportion of children with fillings compared to Newport, which does have CWF.



WHY do anti-fluoridationists claim that fluoride is a poison, or express concerns about safety?

There is a lot of misinformation about fluoridation. Medical experts reviewing the totality of fluoride research have concluded that it is safe. A deeply flawed study that claimed fluoride lowered IQ has been debunked by experts at the Yale School of Medicine, the Water Research Foundation, Indiana University's Department of Pediatrics, and others. A rigorous study done by Harvard in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute found no link between fluoridation and bone cancer. Experts at the Society of Toxicology examined this issue and state, "medical scientists have agreed that small concentrations of fluoride have health benefits that vastly exceed any hypothetical health risk."

More information:

- Campaign for Dental Health: ilikemyteeth.org/
- American Fluoridation Society: americanfluoridationsociety.org/
- Oral Health Program, Rhode Island Department of Health: www.health.ri.org/oralhealth/fluoridation
- FLO – Fluoride Learning Online: Coming soon from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

For information or assistance, contact Veronica Rosa-DaFonseca, Fluoride and Sealant Coordinator
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