

Cavity Statistics Don't Support Fluoridation

By Jay Harris Levy, D.D.S., and Kimberly Kaminski

Last week's major news about new local and state cavity data should make everyone's decision about whether to increase our water rates to add fluoridation chemicals to our water a lot easier.

For many months Portlanders have heard those pushing fluoridation say that Oregon residents have some of the worst teeth in the country and that Portland has a "dental crisis" that only fluoridation can solve. They are now spending big money on TV ads making the same claim.

It has been the central argument as to why voters should agree to increase Portland Water Bureau rates to pay for up to \$7.6 million for a fluoridation plant, and the yearly costs of adding 1.1 million pounds of the fluoridation chemical called fluorosilicic acid into everyone's drinking water.

As it turns out, thanks to investigative reporting by Portland's KATU-2 News, new state cavity data shows fluoridation supporters' central arguments are completely inaccurate. The new cavity data that KATU and The Oregonian obtained through Oregon's Public Records Act shows that cavity rates in Oregon just dropped 19 percent while Multnomah County's rates dropped by 10 percent.

The new rates are not just a big improvement but mean the percentage of our kids who have ever had a cavity is now well below the national average and below the rates in many cities that have been fluoridated for decades. In fact, Portland schools' rate of untreated tooth decay was not just below the national average but was actually more than 25 percent below ambitious federal health goals set for the year 2020 (Multnomah County untreated decay rate, 21 percent; 2020 federal goal, 26 percent).

Even more relevant is that the new state data shows Portland kids actually have lower cavity rates than kids in Oregon's fluoridated cities. Despite all the hype from fluoridation promoters, KATU's analysis for the new data showed that 48 percent of kids surveyed in Portland's schools have had a cavity at some point while kids attending schools in Oregon's fluoridated cities had a 52 percent cavity rate.

While this was clearly bad news for those pushing fluoridation, it highlights that we already have better alternatives for helping children's teeth than increasing water rates to add fluoridation chemicals to our water.

Fluoridation would add fluorosilicic acid, a known byproduct of industrial fertilizer manufacturing, to every Portlander's home regardless of whether they consent to what is clearly a medical treatment intended to reduce cavities. Fluoridation takes away every Portlander's right to decide whether they want to swallow fluoridation chemicals in every glass of water they and children drink.

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When a city government adds fluoridation chemicals to the water, it takes the important medical principle of an individual's consent and choice, and throws it out the window. Given the recent scientific studies from the National Academy of Sciences, Harvard and other scientists finding real health risks from even low concentrations of fluoride in water, the right to be able to decide not to swallow fluoride is all the more important. Although fluoridation promoters and the Water Bureau claim the price of adding fluoridation chemicals would be minimal, the fluoridation measure actually contains no limit on how much water rates could increase. The Water Bureau's price claims also ignore the fact that 40 percent of the ratepayers buying water from the bureau don't live in the city and won't likely have to pay a dime for fluoridation.

Their long-term price contracts don't require them to pay for elective expenses like fluoridation chemicals. As a result, Portland ratepayers could be left paying all the costs of fluoridation, including costs that even the Water Bureau admits it has not yet even considered.

Despite the new cavity data, fluoridation promoters are spending money on grossly misleading TV ads that try to hang on to the "dental crisis" argument by comparing Multnomah County's untreated decay rates to Seattle's untreated decay rates. Fluoridation supporters apparently hope voters don't recognize that "untreated" decay rates reflect differences in access to care, not fluoridation.

Unfortunately, the fluoridation campaign's main response to the new cavity data has been to launch vitriolic personal attacks, including the ridiculous idea of an "organized" effort to steal pro-fluoridation lawn signs.

But attempting to smear the diverse and bipartisan groups opposing fluoridation, from the Sierra Club's Columbia Group and the Cascade Policy Institute to the Portland National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and more than 200 Portland medical professionals, reflects a cynical political attempt to shift attention from the issues that actually matter.

Portland can and should continue to work to improve kids' teeth. But as the recent cavity reduction rates show, we do not need to increase our water rates so that the Water Bureau can send fluoridation chemicals into every Portlander's home, regardless of whether they want them. Visit CleanWaterPortland.org and be sure to vote "no" on fluoridation chemicals.

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