

Division of Public Health Update
on
Proposed Revised Fluoride Level in Drinking Water Recommendations

On January 7, 2011, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a notice proposing a change to the recommendation for the optimal fluoride level in drinking water to prevent tooth decay. The proposed recommendation, 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water (mg/L), would replace the previous recommended range of 0.7 to 1.2 mg/L. In Wisconsin, we currently fluoridate at 1.0 mg/L. Until the final recommendations are released by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Wisconsin community water systems are encouraged to continue fluoridating at 1.0 mg/L.

HHS's updated recommendation regarding the optimal level of fluoride for public water supplies is based upon the latest science. This announcement simply recognizes that since fluoride is reaching children from more sources today than it was in the early 1960's, it makes sense to adjust the recommended level in the drinking water. Community water fluoridation is a safe, effective, and inexpensive way to prevent dental caries. This modality benefits persons in all age groups and of all SES, including those difficult to reach through other public health programs and private dental care. Community water fluoridation also is the most cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay among populations living in areas with adequate community water supply systems. Continuation of community water fluoridation for these populations and its adoption in additional communities are the foundation for sound caries-prevention programs.

The notice of the proposed recommendation was published in the Federal Register, and HHS accepted comments from the public and stakeholders on the proposed recommendations. HHS is reviewing and responding to the public comments and is expecting to publish final guidance for community water fluoridation in 2012. An official recommendation for Wisconsin will follow after the final guidance from HHS is released.

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health is in communication with the Drinking Water & Groundwater Program personnel in the Department of Natural Resources on this issue. The DNR is also in communication with Regional DNR staff and with local water works operators.

The Oral Health Program in the Division of Public Health will continue to provide updated information on these recommendations.