

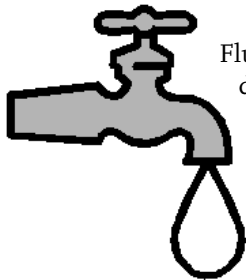
THE LINK



The Link is a monthly newsletter published by Delta Dental of New Mexico about the role of dental insurance, and the link between oral health and overall health. Since it includes oral health news, industry news, and Delta Dental updates, it's also our link to you.

82 million Americans live without fluoridated community water

Community water fluoridation has dramatically improved the oral health of our nation since its introduction in 1945. Today, however, 82 million Americans still do not have access to fluoridated water. Rural communities in New Mexico served by individual wells may be among that number.



Fluoridating municipal water supplies is one of the most effective ways to help decrease dental decay and chronic oral infections. Fluoride reinforces and protects tooth enamel from the effects of bacteria that release acid and cause tooth decay.

Communities with fluoridated drinking water in the U.S. have 15 to 40 percent less tooth decay. Systemic fluoride, such as what is ingested with water, strengthens teeth from the inside. Topical treatments, such as fluoride toothpastes, gels or rinses, provide additional, immediate protection.

Drinking fluoridated water, along with using fluoride toothpaste twice daily, delivers optimal levels of fluoride's cavity-fighting protection. Delta Dental recommends that enrollees ask their dentists about whether they're getting too much or too little fluoride. A dentist can make recommendations on adjusting intake to achieve optimal levels. In excess, fluoride can cause tooth discoloration—a harmless condition called fluorosis.

Along with its oral health benefits, water fluoridation is also cost-effective. On average, fluoridation costs 72 cents per person per year in U.S. communities, while it saves from \$15.95 per person per year in a small community to \$18.62 per person per year in a larger community.

Since 1990, it is estimated that water fluoridation has resulted in dental treatment cost savings of over \$25.7 billion. If the remaining 34 percent of the population would have had fluoridated water, the savings may have been an additional \$1.5 billion per year.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Dental Association (ADA) publish information on their Web sites about which communities fluoridate their water supplies. For people living in communities where fluoride concentrations in drinking water have not been raised to recommended levels, dentists can prescribe fluoride supplements.

??? FAQs ???

What types of plans does Delta Dental of New Mexico have available to employer groups?

For groups with fewer than 100 employees, Delta Dental has up to five different plan designs if the employer is electing to contribute to the premium cost for their employees. Within each basic plan design there are also benefit options, such as coverage for Orthodontic care or higher levels of plan maximums, all of which give employers many ways to meet their individual coverage and budget goals. Available options vary based on group size and, for larger employers, custom plan designs are available.

For answers to more questions such as this one, visit the "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) link in the Employers, Brokers, or Subscribers section of the Delta Dental of New Mexico website.

New Delta Dental Website Educates Americans about Oral Health Care Reform

Delta Dental Plans Association, the leading, national dental benefits carrier, has launched a Web site (www.advanceoralhealth.com) to educate the public, regulators, lawmakers and policymakers about the importance of including dental benefits in health care reform.



“Delta Dental is committed to advancing the effort to include greater access to affordable dental care in overall health care reform,” says Janis Oshensky, Vice President of Dental Relations and Public Policy for Delta Dental Plans Association. “More than 130 million Americans lack dental benefits coverage. As a result, they are nearly half as likely to visit a dentist at least once annually as those with coverage. This endangers not only their oral health, but as studies increasingly show it endangers their overall health as well.”

The site includes information about the effects of poor oral health, the connection between oral and overall health, the significant differences between medical and dental benefits and the importance of preventive dental treatment.

“Preventive treatment and proper oral health are essential to general health and well-being,” says Oshensky. “Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases can adversely affect the most basic human needs, including the ability to maintain proper nutrition, communicate, attend school or go to work.”

For policy and lawmakers, the site includes five policy implications to consider when developing health care reform proposals. Following are three of the five policy implications:

- Legislative actions that add to the cost of administering dental benefits or hinder the development of lower cost alternative plan designs will have the unintended effect of reducing the number of Americans with access to affordable dental coverage, thereby reducing access to affordable dental care and diminishing public oral health.
- Dental carriers should be encouraged in their efforts to develop and enforce competitive fee arrangements, equitable reimbursement and dental policies and innovative plan designs to ensure necessary and appropriate care in accordance with group contracts and high professional standards.
- Dental coverage should not be neglected in the debate over how to provide health care to all Americans.

To view all five policy implications and sign up to receive e-mail updates about relevant health care information, please visit www.advanceoralhealth.com.

Teeth Talk

Fluoride: Fluoride exists naturally in water sources and is derived from fluorine, the thirteenth most common element in the Earth's crust. Fluoride prevents the acid produced by the bacteria in plaque from dissolving, or demineralizing, tooth enamel. Fluoride also allows teeth damaged by acid to repair, or remineralize, themselves. Fluoride cannot repair cavities, but it can reverse low levels of tooth decay and thus prevent new cavities from forming.

Coming in May

Millions of Americans dread visiting the dentist. In fact, an estimated 30 to 40 million avoid going to the dentist because of anxiety or fear.

In conjunction with Mental Health Month in May, Delta Dental wants to raise awareness about a mental condition that affects so many Americans – dental phobia.

Read more about dental phobia in the May Issue of *The Link*.