

## Bottled Water May Be Shortchanging Oral Health

On average, Americans drink approximately 2.3 servings of bottled water per day. Although bottled water is portable and convenient, those who drink it may be shortchanging themselves of a tap water benefit that has become so common, its importance has almost been forgotten: fluoride.

For the past 50 years, fluoride has been added to the drinking water in many U.S. communities. As a result, the number of dental caries has declined sharply in those communities. According to the April 2000 Journal of Dental Research, the use of fluoride in the past 40 years has been a primary factor in saving some \$40 billion in oral health care costs. Fluoride helps prevent cavities, whether it is applied topically through toothpastes or fluoride rinses, or ingested through drinking water.

In recent years, however, bottled water has become more and more prevalent. According to the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA), almost half of all Americans drink bottled water daily. According to the IBWA, only about 20 U.S. bottlers sell fluoride-added water.

"We've made such enormous strides toward protecting dental health through community water fluoridation programs that people take fluoridation for granted," says Roger Smith, D.D.S., national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. "It's especially important that children get proper amounts of fluoride while their teeth are developing, to prevent tooth decay. Fluoride is incorporated into the actual tooth enamel when it is ingested during the years that teeth are developing, making teeth very resistant to decay."

Adults should also get adequate amounts of fluoride, as it helps ward off tooth decay throughout a person's lifetime. Fluoride helps prevent root decay, which is especially problematic for adults who experience receding gums. Additionally, many prescription medications taken by adults cause dry mouth which increases susceptibility to root decay.

According to Dr. Smith, "Adults who are concerned about their fluoride intake, or their children's fluoride intake, should talk with their dentists."