

The Fluoride debate

Editors Note: The Watsonville City Council will be holding a special meeting Tuesday night on the possibility of adding fluoride to the city's water system. The special session is open to the public and starts at 7 p.m. The proceedings will also be broadcast live via Charter Communication's cable

Fluoridate Watsonville's water

By DR. JANET BELL

SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

As a physician with 50 years experience working for the health of children in the Pajaro Valley, I've seen enormous challenges, changes and successes. I remember the days - thankfully gone - when polio and measles were a constant fear. I've seen the life-saving impact of mandatory seat belt laws.

But there's one area of our children's welfare where this community has fallen far behind national trends. In fact, we're facing a genuine crisis: the dismal state of our children's dental health.

According to the Dientes Community Dental Clinic, their school-based screenings for Watsonville elementary students reveal an astonishing 75 percent of the children with untreated dental disease, and 10 percent suffering abscessed teeth with advanced infection. This is twice the average in California overall, and three times the national average!

How can we accept such a profound disparity in the health of our own community? Our children and families experience enormous pain and expense ... and the real tragedy is that it's largely preventable.

Over the past 50 years community fluoridation has become widely recognized as the single most effective strategy for reducing tooth decay and dental disease among people of all ages. Numerous recent studies confirm that fluoridation results in 30 to 60 percent fewer cavities in baby teeth, and 20 to 40 percent fewer cavities for people of all

ages.

It's important to stress that even though the benefits of fluoridation are most dramatic for children, there are measurable benefits to people of all ages, including seniors. Fluoridation helps people keep their own teeth in old age, and helps strengthen teeth against decay at any age.

In considering how best to improve community dental health, some people suggest that education and fluoride drops or rinses are the answer. These are certainly worthwhile approaches, but they can never have the sustained, universal impact of water fluoridation.

As a steering committee member for the Healthy Start program of the Pajaro Valley Unified Schools, I've had the opportunity to work with Dientes, and I've been impressed with their screening and treatment programs. But these are tremendously expensive, labor-intensive efforts, and they don't begin to meet the total need.

In my opinion, water fluoridation remains the single most promising, cost-effective tool for improving Watsonville's dental health.

We know from hundreds of studies and decades of experience that fluoridation is both effective and safe.

Fluoridation is endorsed by every major scientific and medical organization in the country, including the American Medical Association, National Academy of Sciences, U.S. Public Health Service, American Dental Association and nearly 100 other professional organizations.

The record is so clear that the National Centers for Disease Con-

trol has named water fluoridation one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of all time.

Further, in response to anti-fluoride scare tactics, the CDC has stated, "Fluoridation is not a controversy in any scientific sense. There is no valid reason why the benefits of fluoridation should be denied to the citizens of any community."

More than 62 percent of Americans currently benefit from water fluoridation, and the number is growing. In California, over 120 California communities are fluoridated. Some have been fluoridated for years, including San Francisco, Palo Alto, and Long Beach. Others, including San Diego, Los Angeles and Sacramento County, have added fluoridation more recently by local government action.

Tomorrow the Watsonville City Council will consider a resolution to fluoridate Watsonville's water. Shouldn't our residents enjoy the same benefits enjoyed by so many others? Don't our children deserve the best possible start for a healthy future?

The City Council has an opportunity to show real leadership for the future. It's time to fluoridate Watsonville's water.

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Dr. Janet Bell is a retired pediatrician who practiced in Watsonville from 1951-89. She was recently recognized by the Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust for her lifetime contributions to the health of the Pajaro Valley. The opinions of columnists are not necessarily those of the Register-Pajaronian.

television service on Channel 70. The Register-Pajaronian encourages its readers to learn more about the issue and attend Tuesday's meeting. Below are two opinions for and against fluoridating our water.

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Fluoride not needed in water

By JEFF GREEN
SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Once again we hear promoters lament that poor children are not swallowing enough fluoride that they claim would eliminate tooth decay. This message completely ignores that, unbeknownst to most of the public and surprisingly most Watsonville dentists, fluoride is already present in higher concentrations than fluoridated water in sodas, fruit juices, cereals, teas, and, because of fluoride-based pesticide residues, on such produce as tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, and raisins.

In 1993, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services toxicological profile on fluoride reported that non-fluoridated communities already receive the original goal of 1 milligram of fluoride a day, with fluoridated communities receiving 3 to 7 milligrams a day. The fluoridated-community exposures to fluoride far exceed the margin of safety, and according to the largest survey of children's oral health care in the U.S. cause permanent scarring of the enamel of at least one tooth in the form of white opaque spots, brown stains, striations and fracture-prone mottling for 66.4% of children in fluoridated communities.

There is no deficiency of fluoride exposures in any segment of Watsonville's population and the promoters of fluoridation will do everything in their power to dance around a request for proof that there is.

Yet on Tuesday at 7 P.M., the City Council of Watsonville will consider whether it will remain faithful to the longest-held operating principal of all public water suppliers, to provide public access to drinking water that is safe, or whether the Council will turn to mass medication with

no control over how much fluoride any one individual consumes.

Certainly the political pressures are huge. Fluoridation promoters desperately need only four Council Members to rubberstamp the long list of politically-evolved endorsements and to repeat the unsupportable myth that fluoridation is safe, effective, economically cuts across all income classes, and everybody who is anybody is for it.

The Tuesday night test is whether the individual Council Members have performed their due diligence — whether they have really done their homework and reviewed the facts.

Is everybody for fluoridation?

Fact: 98 percent of Europe is now fluoridation-free, with the second-leading political party in Ireland, the most fluoridated country in the world, also vowing in 2001 to eliminate all fluoridation; California communities have turned down fluoridation more than 100 times; there have only been two cases in the last 28 years in which the majority of citizens in a California community have voted for fluoridation; and citizens in Watsonville have already overwhelmingly rejected fluoridation twice. With the two exceptions, all of the recent decisions in California to fluoridate have been a mere handful of elected officials using their police powers to overturn previous citizen rejections.

Will fluoridating Watsonville reduce tooth decay?

Fact: The July 2000 peer-reviewed cover story of the Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA) just reminded every dentist in America that ingestion of fluoride does not provide any significant reduction in the incidence of tooth decay, no matter how much is incorporated in the enamel

during tooth development- that any beneficial dental effect is as a result of topical application directly to the tooth. The amount of fluoride in saliva generated by swallowing fluoride is insufficient to counteract high acid and bacterial challenges to oral health found in conditions such as Baby Bottle Tooth Decay and teenagers constantly sipping sodas.

Are there 30,000 or even 3,000 studies on the safety and effectiveness of fluoride?

Fact: In the Congressional investigation on fluoride by the U.S. House Committee on Science, the Environmental Protection Agency, Center for Disease Control, National Sanitation Foundation, and the Food and Drug Administration, have all replied in the year 2000 that they have no scientific studies of safety or effectiveness on the actual fluorine-bearing substances used in 90 percent of the nation's fluoridation programs.

The issue that should be before the Council is not the mythical magic bullet that will delude parents into thinking children's sugar intake can proceed unabated.

The issue should be prenatal dental education, an honest update on dental hygiene, and access to dental care. With most of the dentists in Watsonville not accepting indigent patients because they are forced to accept 30 cents on the dollar in State assistance as total payment, the heartbreaking sight of neglected children will continue — fluoridation is not the answer.

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Jeff Green is the national director of the Citizens for Safe Drinking Water. The opinions of columnists are not necessarily those of the Register-Pajaronian