



BOARD OF HEALTH

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Johnson County Position Paper Community Water Fluoridation

The Johnson County Board of Health strongly supports the fluoridation of community water systems. While fluoride occurs naturally in all water, it is rarely at the optimal level to protect teeth. Community water fluoridation has been extensively studied for more than 80 years and has been proven to be safe and extremely effective in preventing dental cavities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognized fluoridation as one of the ten greatest public health achievements of the twentieth century.

Water fluoridation improves oral health for people of all ages, income levels, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Fluoridation of community water systems in Iowa began in 1951 in the City of Waukon. Today nearly 2.4 million Iowans have access to community water fluoridation.

Community water fluoridation is an investment in the improvement of health outcomes for all Iowans. Poor oral health increases the risks of heart disease, stroke, and respiratory infections, as well as the risks of complications of diabetes and pregnancy. Poor oral health can also impact quality of life through difficulty speaking, pain, social stigma, and difficulty eating which leads to malnutrition.

Fluoridation of community water systems prevents at least 25 percent of tooth decay in children and adults, even in an era with widespread availability of fluoride from toothpaste and other sources. Today, fluoridation is still the most cost-effective way to prevent dental cavities. The average lifetime per person cost to fluoridate a community water supply is less than the cost of a single dental filling. In most cities, \$1 invested in water fluoridation saves \$38 in dental treatment costs.

Community Water fluoridation offers an early, inexpensive preventive strategy that benefits all that simply turn on their tap. In Johnson County, 81% of residents have access to fluoridated water, compared with a rate of 70% for the state as a whole. This is reflected in the rate of emergency department utilization for oral health problems: in 2025, the rate was 17.49 patients per 10,000 residents of Johnson County versus 30.04 per 10,000 Iowans.

Community water fluoridation is a safety net for Iowa's children, especially for those without access to dental care. Every year, fewer dentists accept children with Medicaid. In fact, in 2024, only 41% of children 0-12 years old with Medicaid insurance were able to receive care from a dentist. This gap in access to care necessitates the continuation of community water fluoridation.

A community where all can achieve optimal health

The Johnson County Board of Health firmly supports and continues to encourage community water fluoridation as recommended by the US Public Health Service and the American Dental Association. It is the most economical and effective means to control the major public health problem of dental cavities and oral disease.

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