



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Why Fluoridated Water Still Matters for Jefferson County**

By Dr. David Hicks, Jefferson County Health Officer

When public health works well, most people never notice. We expect our water to be safe, our food to be inspected, and our communities to support health—not illness. Community water fluoridation is one of those behind-the-scenes protections, and in Jefferson County, it remains an important part of keeping our families healthy.

Tooth decay is often dismissed as minor, but it is one of the most common chronic conditions affecting children and adults. In Alabama, recent school-based screenings show that more than one in five kindergarteners and nearly one in four third graders have untreated tooth decay, rates that exceed national averages.<sup>1</sup> Untreated cavities cause pain, infection, missed school days, and costly emergency care—problems that disproportionately affect families with limited access to dental services.

Fluoridated water helps prevent these outcomes. By maintaining a low level of fluoride in the mouth throughout the day, it strengthens tooth enamel and reduces the risk of cavities across the lifespan. Decades of research show that communities with fluoridated water experience lower rates of tooth decay than those without it, even in the modern era of fluoride toothpaste.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

In Alabama, about 77% of people served by public water systems receive fluoridated water, slightly above the national average but still leaving large gaps.<sup>5,6</sup> Jefferson County performs better than many counties, with nearly all residents on public water systems receiving fluoridated water. That matters, because counties with lower fluoridation coverage tend to see higher rates of untreated tooth decay in children.

Some have asked whether fluoridation is still needed now that fluoride toothpaste is widely available. Toothpaste is important, but it requires regular access, proper

use, and consistent habits. Fluoridated water provides continuous, passive protection, benefiting everyone who drinks it—regardless of income, insurance status, or ability to see a dentist. When communities discontinue fluoridation, cavity rates reliably rise, particularly among children and low-income families.<sup>2,3,4,7</sup>

Safety is another common concern. Fluoride is one of the most studied public health interventions in history. In the United States, water systems target 0.7 milligrams per liter, a level chosen to maximize dental benefits while minimizing risks. Extensive reviews by national scientific bodies find no credible evidence of serious health harm at this level.<sup>4,8,9</sup>

Fluoridation is a highly cost-effective choice for communities. For every dollar invested, several dollars are saved on dental treatments—benefiting families, schools, and taxpayers. Supplying optimally fluoridated water across US communities for a year saves \$6.5 billion in dental expenses and achieves an average return of \$20 for every dollar spent. On average, communities with fluoridated water see 25% fewer cavities, saving \$32 per person each year by avoiding dental costs and reducing missed work and school days.<sup>4,7,10,11</sup>

In Jefferson County and across Alabama, we face real challenges in access to dental care. Water fluoridation is not a cure-all, but it is a proven and affordable tool that protects everyone, especially children. Preserving it is a practical step toward a healthier community.

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<sup>1</sup> Alabama Department of Public Health. *The Oral Health of Alabama's Kindergarten and Third Grade Children: 2020–2022 Oral Health Survey Data Brief*. Montgomery, AL: ADPH; July 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Iheozor-Ejiofor Z, et al. *Water fluoridation for the prevention of dental caries*. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Nascimento CFD, et al. *Water fluoridation and dental caries prevention globally: A systematic review and meta-analysis*. JDR Clin Transl Res. 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Scientific Statement on the Evidence Supporting the Safety and Effectiveness of Community Water Fluoridation*. May 15, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *2022 Water Fluoridation Statistics*. CDC Water Fluoridation Reporting System (WFRS); published June 6, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> United Health Foundation. *America's Health Rankings: Water Fluoridation—Alabama*. Analysis of CDC WFRS data, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Community Preventive Services Task Force. *Dental Caries (Cavities): Community Water Fluoridation*. The Community Guide.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Public Health Service. *Recommendation for Fluoride Concentration in Drinking Water for the Prevention of Dental Caries*. Public Health Reports. 2015.

<sup>9</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Fluoride in Drinking Water: A Scientific Review of EPA's Standards*. 2006; and subsequent reviews.

<sup>10</sup> Griffin SO, Jones K, Tomar SL. *An economic evaluation of community water fluoridation*. J Public Health Dent. 2001;61(2):78–86; reaffirmed by CDC analyses.

<sup>11</sup> Ran T, & Chattopadhyay SK. *Economic evaluation of community water fluoridation: A Community Guide systematic review*. Am J Prev Med. 2016; 50(6), 790–796.

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About JCDH The Jefferson County Department of Health (JCDH) was established in 1917. JCDH serves as the primary resource for public health issues in Jefferson County. JCDH has three health centers strategically located throughout the county. JCDH is responsible for providing health care, preventing the spread of diseases, and protecting against outbreaks. JCDH provides outpatient health care for Jefferson County's underinsured and uninsured residents. JCDH health centers provide child health, dental health, family planning, immunizations, maternity care, nutrition (WIC), case management, and Medicaid enrollment. JCDH Disease Control Specialty Clinics include: Tuberculosis, Sexual Health, and International Travel Clinics. Vital Records can be obtained for birth, death or marriage events that occurred in the state of Alabama. Environmental Health Services is responsible for Air and Radiation, Food and Lodging, Community Assessment and Community Environmental Protection. For additional information please visit [www.jcdh.org](http://www.jcdh.org).