



# Helping Hands

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## FLUORIDE AND CAVITY PREVENTION

### What is Tooth Decay?

Healthy tooth enamel is hard yet porous. Dental caries, decay, or a “cavity” occurs when the hard tooth structure is damaged and breaks down. Plaque on the surface of your teeth can produce acids that seep into the pores (pores) of the enamel and break down its internal structure. This process, called demineralization, can create a weak spot on the surface of the tooth that may become a cavity if left untreated.

### The Role of Fluoride in Cavity Prevention:

Fluoride is a naturally-occurring mineral that is present in many foods and water. Fluoride fights cavities in three ways. First, it kills cavity-producing bacteria. Second, it prevents the acid produced by the bacteria in plaque from demineralizing or breaking down tooth enamel. Finally, fluoride can also help reverse low levels of tooth decay by allowing the teeth to repair acid damage by remineralization (strengthening areas that are weakened and beginning to develop cavities). Fluoride helps keep tooth enamel strong and solid.

Fluoride comes in two forms, systemic and topical. Systemic fluoride is found in many foods and in most tap water. Topical fluoride can be found in toothpastes and mouth rinses; or your dentist can apply fluoride gel, foam, or varnish in the dental office. Beyond that of fluoridated water alone, in-office, professional fluoride treatments can reduce a child’s cavity rate by 25-30% when placed 2 times per year.

### Is Fluoride Safe?

Community water fluoridation is an effective, safe and inexpensive way to help prevent tooth decay. The CDC recognized fluoridation of water as one of the 10 greatest public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fluoridation of community water has been credited with reducing tooth decay by over 50% in the United States since World War II. Topical fluoride (toothpaste, mouth rinses, professional applications, etc.) is also safe and effective when used as directed but can be hazardous if swallowed in high doses. For this reason it is important for parents to supervise their children’s use of fluoride-containing products.

### Tips for Fluoride Use:

- \*From the time of eruption of a child’s first tooth to age 3, brush with a “smear” of fluoride toothpaste. From age 3 to age 6, brush with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- \*Do not let children swallow fluoridated toothpaste and store flavored toothpaste out of reach for young children.
- \*Give children vitamins that **do not** contain fluoride
- \*Avoid soy-based infant formulas that contain fluoride

Please weigh these benefits of a preventive measure to decrease dental decay against having to restore cavities in your child for the lifetime of his or her teeth. If you have any questions please feel free to contact our office at (970) 493-2254 or visit our website at [www.fckidsdentist.com](http://www.fckidsdentist.com).