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Dental surgeons back water fluoridation policy

WE SUPPORT the Ministry of Health's reply which confirms the safety and cost-effective measure of adding fluoride in low amounts to drinking water ("Water fluoridation safe, with dental benefits"; last Saturday).

Many countries, unlike Singapore, do not have the convenience of a central water supply to which a measured quantity of fluoride can be added in amounts required for optimal effects in reducing caries and preserving teeth.

Hence, sometimes, fluoride which naturally occurs in the soil can be in greater concentrations than necessary, especially when the water is recovered from sources in the depths of the earth like wells.

But in Singapore, because it is easy to control the addition of fluoride to water and regulate it according to oral health habits, diet and changing conditions of the oral health status of Singaporeans, we have managed to provide a labour-saving and effective public health measure which has had a wide public reach regardless of socio-economic status.

The constant monitoring of the fluoride has resulted in a cost-effective measure which has provided benefits to all.

The major benefit happens when the optimally fluoridated water provides a protective local effect.

This occurs as the fluoride in the water combines with other minerals present in saliva and is deposited on the surface of the tooth, strengthening it and preventing tooth decay.

Hence, the effect is topical and whatever amount of fluoride ingested when water is drunk is too minute to cause any systemic effect.

To remove such an easily organised and all-encompassing public health measure is tantamount to regression in our fight against dental caries, especially now that other major risk factors like processed foods - which, due to their very nature, cause tooth decay - are easily available.

Most parents in Singapore, with their busy lifestyles, may not be able to closely monitor the oral health habits of their children, and so the proper use of other fluoride options may be unavailable to these children.

Research findings from reputable studies from the time fluoride was discovered has shown only beneficial effects of fluoride with no untoward effects, when it was used in optimal amounts relevant to the environment, climate and conditions of living of the studied society.

Hemalatha Nathan (Dr)

**Chapter Chairman of Public Health Dentists
College of Dental Surgeons, Singapore**

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