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**National Health and Child Groups Launch New Campaign for Dental Health**  
*Goal Is to Raise Public's Oral Health Awareness and Encourage Water Fluoridation*

WASHINGTON – At a time when at least 45 million Americans lack dental insurance, children can pay a hefty price as toothaches or other dental problems hinder their ability to grow, learn and lead healthy lives. Today, three national organizations launched the Campaign for Dental Health to educate the public about oral health's importance and the need for states and communities to invest in proven forms of prevention such as water fluoridation.

Voices for America's Children, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Pew Children's Dental Campaign are among the organizations partnering on the new national campaign, seeking to reinvigorate efforts to expand and preserve water fluoridation. The Campaign for Dental Health (CDH) will provide reliable, scientific information about oral health and fluoridation, a strategy shown to prevent tooth decay. One of CDH's educational tools will be a new web portal called [iLikeMyTeeth.org](http://iLikeMyTeeth.org).

Fluoride exists naturally in virtually all water supplies. Water is "fluoridated" when a public water system adjusts the fluoride to a level known to prevent tooth decay. The American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Institute of Medicine, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are among the many respected organizations that have endorsed fluoridation as a safe, effective way to reduce decay.

Currently, 72 percent of Americans whose homes are connected to public water systems receive drinking water that is fluoridated. Yet less than half of residents in nine states – Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon and Wyoming – have access to fluoridated water. In all, more than 70 million Americans lack access to fluoridated water.

"Although children's teeth are healthier overall than they were decades ago, we still have a long way to go," said Bill Bentley, President and CEO of Voices for America's Children. "A study last year showed that nearly one out of seven young children aged 6 to 12 had suffered a toothache in the previous six months. In a single year, more than 500,000 California children missed at least one day of school due to a dental problem. Communities should not deprive children of fluoridated water, which is a proven way to fight tooth decay."

Many people whose water is not fluoridated mistakenly assume that it is. This lack of awareness, coupled with an increasingly aggressive opposition, presents water fluoridation with its toughest challenge in decades. Although the overall rate of fluoridation continues to rise, a small but determined band of anti-fluoride activists is actively pressing communities not to fluoridate. These activists are using the Internet to raise unfounded fears and spread misinformation, ignoring the evidence showing that fluoridation is a safe, effective strategy.

Elected officials in several communities from Alaska to Florida have voted recently to end fluoridation. Some of these votes were prompted by unfounded fears about safety or the desire to save tax dollars—a goal that is shattered by evidence showing that most cities save \$38 for every dollar spent on fluoridation.

“Public policy decisions about health should be based on sound science,” said Shelly Gehshan, director of the Pew Children’s Dental Campaign. “Anti-fluoride activists are using a number of arguments that misrepresent what the research says. Opponents have tried to raise fears about fluoridation’s safety by citing foreign studies of fluoride levels that were at least two or three times higher than the level used to fluoridate U.S. public water systems.”

The CDH’s web portal will help to counter the misinformation that the public is getting from anti-fluoride activists. The website will also link to FluorideScience.org, another site that will soon go public, providing policy makers and health officials with concise, reliable reviews of the research on fluoride.

Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel and reduces decay, benefiting people of all ages and income groups without requiring them to spend extra money or change daily habits. As fluoridation has expanded to reach more Americans, our nation has seen a significant reduction in cavities and other dental problems. For example, the average number of decayed, filled or missing teeth among 12-year-olds in the U.S. fell 68 percent between 1966 and 1994.

“Children’s teeth are healthier than ever, but pediatricians around the country are still seeing kids, especially those from low-income areas, with high levels of decay,” said Mary Brown, MD, FAAP, an Oregon pediatrician and past board member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “Expanding fluoridation would really help improve children’s oral health. It’s such an effective strategy because it doesn’t require families to spend extra money or change their daily routine.”

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As the nation’s largest network of multi-issue child advocacy organizations, Voices for America’s Children (Voices) has been on the forefront of every major child policy victory for the past quarter-century. With 62 members nationwide, Voices speaks up for kids, and mobilizes and advocates for public policies to improve the lives of all children, especially those most vulnerable, throughout the United States. Visit us at [www.voices.org](http://www.voices.org). Voices is a founding member of the Children’s Leadership Council, a coalition of more than 50 leading national policy and advocacy organizations. [www.childrenleadershipcouncil.com](http://www.childrenleadershipcouncil.com).