

# Fluoride... the Foundation for Preventing Cavities

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Fluoride is a natural substance and is the 17th most abundant element in nature. Fluoride is known as “nature’s way of preventing tooth decay.”



Fluoride protects teeth from cavities and helps to reverse early dental decay by hardening, remineralizing, the tooth’s outer surface and can have a systemic effect or a topical, on the surface, effect.

### TOPICAL FLUORIDE:

Most toothpaste contains fluoride and when used in a moderate amount is beneficial to reducing cavities.



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For babies under the age of 12 months, toothpaste should not be used. Babies under age 2 should only use a smear of toothpaste. Toddlers ages 2 to 5 years should use a “pea sized” amount of toothpaste. Very young children tend to swallow toothpaste and not spit it out. Children under the age of 6 should be supervised while brushing their teeth and reminded to SPIT then RINSE with water to avoid swallowing the toothpaste.

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When your child visits the dentist or dental hygienist, they may also receive a topical fluoride treatment. This fluoride may come in the form of gel, foam or varnish. Fluoride varnish is a bit easier to apply for younger children, but all topical fluorides have the same effect and benefit of helping teeth stay strong to prevent cavities.

## **SYSTEMIC FLUORIDE:**

Fluoride added to community water supplies is the most economical and beneficial way to strengthen baby teeth and permanent teeth as they develop since this water is easily accessible for everyone to cook



with and drink. Fluoride in drinking water has systemic effects. It helps the teeth that are still developing and not yet erupted. To find out more about fluoridation or if your town is fluoridated, contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of Oral Health at 617-624-6074 or [www.mass.gov/dph/oralhealth](http://www.mass.gov/dph/oralhealth)

If you don't live in a community with fluoridated water, your child may either take fluoride tablets or drops beginning at 6 months of age. The tablets and drops are prescribed by a pediatrician, nurse practitioner or dentist and are taken on a daily basis to imitate the effects of fluoridated water.