

Don't Let Poisonmongers Scare You

Stephen Barrett, M.D.

Any community that considers fluoridation will be flooded with scare propaganda from poisonmongers. Fluoridation's benefits—to both children and adults—are supported by thousands of scientific studies that prove these alarmists wrong. But that makes no difference to them. Their goal is to end fluoridation everywhere. Even communities that have been fluoridated for many years are being targeted.

Instead of telling you that fluoride is found naturally in all water, they call it a "pollutant." Instead of telling you that fluoride is an important nutrient, they call it a "poison." Instead of the big truth—that fluoridation is safe, effective, and economical—they tell the big lie and say it causes hundreds of ailments.

The effects of fluoridated water have been studied for more than a hundred years. As far back as 1892 a British physician suggested that high tooth decay rates in London might be due to lack of fluoride in the diet. In 1908, a Colorado dentist named Frederick McKay reported that something in the drinking water of certain communities helped lessen tooth decay. That "something," Dr. McKay learned in 1931, was fluoride.

Spurred on by this discovery, U.S. Public Health Service dental scientists found that a concentration of one part fluoride to one million parts of water would strengthen teeth while they were forming. Many communities had this concentration naturally in their water supply. By 1945, engineers could adjust the concentration of those which had too little. In that year, studies of controlled fluoridation began. As the evidence built up, thousands of communities acted to obtain its benefits.

In 2018, more than 207 million Americans (73% of those who receive public water supplies) in more than 18,000 communities have fluoridated water. But about 77 million others receive public water supplies that are not fluoridated—thanks largely to the efforts of alarmists.

Antifluoridation activity in America

is orchestrated primarily by the Fluoride Action Network (FAN), whose leader is Paul Connett, Ph.D., a retired chemistry professor. Fluoridation is supported by major health groups and government agencies throughout the developed world and has been listed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention among the 20th Century's ten great public health achievements. But Connett would have you believe that fluoridation is ineffective, unsafe, and unethical. In effect, he would like you to believe that he's smarter than all of these organizations put together.

For about 20 years, antifluoridation forces were spearheaded by John Yiamouyiannis, Ph.D. (1943-2000), who, like Connett, wrote a lot and traveled widely to present his viewpoint. Though public health officials regarded Yiamouyiannis as a charlatan, to the uninformed he seemed credible, and his activities frightened many communities.

In 1985, after investigating for two years, a team of public health experts from the Ohio Department of Health published a book analyzing his 8-page pamphlet, "A Lifesaver's Guide to Fluoridation," which was distributed

Dr. Barrett, who resides near Chapel Hill, North Carolina, has achieved national renown as an author, editor, and consumer advocate. An expert in medical communications, he operates Quackwatch, Dental Watch, and 22 other consumer-protection Web sites; co-edits *Consumer Health Digest* (a free electronic newsletter); has been a peer-review panelist for several top medical journals; and has delivered more than 300 talks at colleges, universities, medical schools, and professional meetings. His 53 books include *The Health Robbers: A Close Look at Quackery in America* and eight editions of the college textbook *Consumer Health: A Guide to Intelligent Decisions*. In 1984, he received an FDA Commissioner's Special Citation Award for Public Service in fighting nutrition quackery. In 2001, he received the American Association for Health Education's Distinguished Service to Health Education Award. He has been listed in *Marquis Who's Who in America* since 1991. He has been monitoring antifluoridation propaganda for more than 40 years. For additional information about fluoridation, see <http://www.ilikemyteeth.org>.

wherever community fluoridation was considered. The pamphlet cited 250 references that supposedly backed his claims that fluoridation is ineffective and dangerous. However, when the Ohio team traced the references, they found that almost half had no relevance to community water fluoridation and many others actually supported fluoridation but were selectively quoted and misrepresented. Yiamouyiannis also opposed vaccination and co-authored a book that claimed that the human immunodeficiency virus does not cause AIDS. Despite all this, FAN's Web site considers Yiamouyiannis "a man of true honor and integrity" and contains more than 150 pages that promote his views.

As with Yiamouyiannis, a detailed analysis of FAN's views would be useful, but its Web site is so large that responding to every mistaken assertion is impractical. In 2020, searching the site with Google for the words "poison" or "toxic," I found more than 1,500 pages.

Over the years, antifluoridationists have offered hundreds of objections. If even one were valid, do you think fluoridation would still be with us? Do you think that the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dental Association, the U.S. Public Health Service, and other organizations that have endorsed fluoridation want to poison you?

Water fluoridation prevents tooth decay mainly by providing teeth with fluoride at the important time when they are made and maintains this contact daily throughout life. Today, even with other sources of fluoride available, studies show that water fluoridation reduces the lifetime risk of tooth decay by about 25%. It has been conservatively estimated that each dollar invested in community fluoridation yields about \$20 in reduced dental costs. The small amounts of fluoride in water also help to strengthen bones.

If you live in a fluoridated community, consider yourself lucky. But no matter where you live, don't let poisonmongers scare you. Think of fluoridation as a modern health miracle.