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DENTAL FLUOROSIS IN BLACK CHILDREN AND WHITE CHILDREN

A form letter alleging that fluoridation may be more harmful to black children than to white children has been widely circulated. A postscript to the letter indicates that it was prepared by the Vice President of the National Health Federation. The National Health Federation, an organization which was described by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1963 as "a front for promoters of unproved remedies, eccentric theories and quackery," has long opposed fluoridation.

The allegation appears to be based upon an erroneous interpretation of a 1962 research report by Dr. A. L. Russell on water fluoridation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which noted a higher prevalence of minor enamel opacities, presumably connected with fluoride consumption, in black children. This report titled, "Dental fluorosis in Grand Rapids during the seventeenth year of fluoridation," appeared in the Journal of the American Dental Association.

There are various classifications of such dental fluorosis (mottling) from questionable to severe. The fluorosis referred to by Dr. Russell in his 1962 report was of the questionable to mild classification. Contrary to allegations in the form letter, this fluorosis (mottling) is not "easily visible to the naked eye" and does not "turn yellow and brown in later life." It is detectable only by a trained person. This degree of fluorosis, which Dr. Russell reported as more prevalent in the limited number of black children he studied, was of the same degree as that observed in white children.

Pigmented enamel opacities from causes other than fluoride are normally found in all areas, fluoridated or nonfluoridated. Where optimal fluoridation has been in effect, examiners have reported that there are fewer of this latter type of discolored enamel opacities than would normally be present in non-fluoridated areas.

Some examiners have also reported that their findings suggest that black children may receive a proportionately greater protection from tooth decay from fluoridation than white children in the same communities.

The National Institute for Dental Research, the dental research arm of the National Institutes of Health, has stated that the notion that the consumption of optimally fluoridated community water supplies may be harmful to the teeth of black children is completely contrary to the results of scientific research.

Division of Dental Health
Preventive Practices Branch
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20014