

# Louisiana's Kids have Reasons to



## Issue

Who wants awful pain and a poor smile? Louisiana sees increases in the number of people with dental caries or tooth decay, each year. Left untreated, dental caries leads to pain, infection, hospitalization, loss of teeth, and increased costs.

- For Louisiana Medicaid eligible children, treatment costs in non-fluoridated areas were twice as high as the average treatment costs in fluoridated areas; children in these areas are three times more likely to receive treatment in a hospital (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or CDC).
- A Louisiana study found that the cost to treat children in a hospital was \$1,508 compared to \$104 in a dental clinic (Brushing up on Children's Oral Health in Louisiana - A Policy Brief).
- In Louisiana, there are not enough dentists who accept Medicaid patients. There are 657,138 Medicaid eligible children under age 19 in the state (Louisiana Medicaid Management Information System).
- Louisiana ranked 38th in dentists per capita, with 39.5 dentists per 100,000 residents. This is well below the national average of 48.4 dentists per 100,000 residents (Brushing Up ... - A Policy Brief).
- Extensive travel to dental exams is required for people in rural parishes without a dentist and therefore serves as a hindrance for them to receive dental care.

The U. S. Task Force on Community Preventive Services has issued strong recommendations for water fluoridation. Studies reviewed by the task force, show that water fluoridation is the most effective way to prevent tooth decay. Best of all, fluoridation is available to everyone without them having to do anything to receive this benefit.

- Every dollar spent on community water fluoridation returns a savings of seven dollars to \$42 in treatment costs according to the CDC.
- Community water fluoridation can reduce dental cavities by 60 percent according to the CDC.

## Intervention

The Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHSBG) is the primary source of funding in Louisiana for fluoridation efforts. The grant enables the state to promote prevention of dental caries and maintain/monitor water fluoridation systems.

In 2005, the following happened because of efforts by a part-time program person and a part-time engineer within the Louisiana public health fluoridation program:

- 47 community water systems were monitored through CDC's Water Fluoridation Reporting System to adjust systems to optimal fluoride levels (serving approximately 1,822,677 people).
- 10 workshops were held at town halls and local parish community centers to educate people on the benefits of fluoridated water; three workshops were held statewide reaching an estimated 300 people.
- Plans to fluoridate five cities were initiated by state fluoridation staff in the 2004-2005 grant year. The new fluoridation systems would reach approximately 120,000 people. The cities along with their completion dates include Crowley (July 2006), Litcher (2004), Oakdale (2005), St. Bernard (July 2007), and Walker (July 2007).

## Impact

Water fluoridation levels did not increase, but enacted legislation, due in part to efforts by the state program staff, helps to ensure future community water fluoridation. About 45.9 percent of Louisiana's population has fluoridated water, below the Healthy People 2010 objective of 75 percent. Resources from the PHHSBG have helped the fluoridation staff to accomplish the following:

- In 2005, successful adoption of a resolution by the Louisiana legislature that requests a study to evaluate the feasibility of community water fluoridation. The findings from this resolution will help to educate the Legislature and gain support to provide a statewide mandate for community water fluoridation in 2006.
- Implementation of plans to provide community water fluoridation in the city of Crowley will increase the population of Louisianans served by public water systems with fluoride to 46 percent.
- Adoption of a city ordinance in the town of Walker to provide community water fluoridation to 15,000 people.

Adoption of a city ordinance in St. Bernard Parish to provide community water fluoridation to about 68,000 people. (Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the parish. It is not certain when residents can return to the parish.)