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Statement of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Water Fluoridation – August 2014

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention is committed to enhancing the health and well being of Maine residents. Community water fluoridation is an evidence-based approach for improving oral health. Fluoridation of community drinking water is a safe, effective way to help prevent tooth decay and improve oral health. We agree with the scientific evidence available to us indicating that the addition of fluoride to community water supplies, at the recommended level for drinking water, is both safe and effective. In Maine, that level was changed in February 2012 to 0.7 milligrams of fluoride to 1 liter of water in accordance with pending recommendations from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Good oral health is part of good overall health, and contributes significantly to an individual's overall well-being. Children with poor oral health may not only suffer discomfort and pain, but may also have problems in learning and in doing well in school. Adults benefit as well. Research evidence suggests associations between poor oral health and the risk for, and management of, chronic and systemic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and with poor outcomes in pregnancy.

Water fluoridation is a bargain for a community. Everyone benefits when fluoridated water is available in schools and other public places. Everyone gains from living in a healthier community, where fewer days are lost from work or school because of dental pain or the need to obtain treatment that could have been prevented, and where fewer tax dollars are spent on subsidized dental care.

Fluoride is a naturally-occurring compound found in the environment. Water fluoridation should be considered in the same way we look at using chlorine and other additives to our drinking water. Maine drinking water regulations for fluoride require strict compliance with national standards for product quality and safety assurance, to prevent harmful levels of contaminants from all water treatment chemicals. Maine's water system operators do an excellent job assuring the safety of the water they provide to the public.

The American Dental Association recommends limiting exposure to fluoridated water for infants who get most or all of their nutrition from reconstituted formula, due to a concern for the potential of mild fluorosis. Fluorosis is not a disease but it can change how teeth look. It is caused when more than the right amounts of fluoride are ingested by very young children while their teeth are forming under the gums. Once teeth are in the mouth, fluorosis cannot occur. The first year of life is the most critical, when teeth can be most affected, so this is why monitoring exposure to fluoride for infants is important. The occasional use of fluoridated water will not harm a baby's developing teeth.

Adequate access to dental care, particularly for those of our residents without insurance, who are MaineCare members, and who live in areas where there are only a few dental providers are issues that have received regular attention in many Maine newspapers and other media. A primary strategy in improving access is to implement and maintain preventive programs on a community level. Early childhood screenings, the availability of topical fluorides such as varnish, gels and rinses, and dental sealants can be integrated as important components in community level oral health programs. Along with these other measures, community water fluoridation has been proven to be an effective intervention that benefits all members of the community, regardless of their ability to gain access to dental care or to maintain other preventive practices.

Water fluoridation is a public health measure, no more and clearly nothing less. In summary, we believe the overwhelming weight of evidence shows it to be in the best interest of Mainers. Water fluoridation is a safe and cost effective way to assure that all members of a community have access to this preventive health measure, without regard to income, insurance, or ability to access dental care.