



Remarks to a City Council or Local Board

Health Professional Version

(+/- 5 minutes, 40 seconds)

NOTE: *This version is written for a health professional (dentist, dental hygienist, physician, nurse, etc.). Read these remarks carefully to ensure that all of the details are appropriate for you and your community.*

Consider adding or deleting a few sentences to help make these remarks more closely reflect your views. Consider adding a personal story, but keep it as brief as possible. Be sure to deliver these remarks a couple of times and time yourself while speaking these remarks aloud. Your city council or other local body will probably have a time limit on remarks from the public, so make sure you keep your remarks within that limit. Be sure to stress certain phrases and to insert pauses when appropriate to draw attention to the key points. Don't speak in a hurry.

George Washington defeated the British, but he couldn't defeat tooth decay. By the time he took office as our nation's first president, Washington had lost all but one of his teeth. He suffered from frequent toothaches, and he wore dentures that made it difficult for him to eat. It was nearly 150 years after George Washington's death before American researchers discovered a successful way to protect teeth from decay. *It's called fluoride.* And it's been a part of American life for 70 years.

But before I talk about fluoride, let's consider what's at stake. As a [dentist/nurse/pediatrician/etc.] in our community, I can tell you that children today have much less tooth decay than they had 40 or 50 years ago. Still, tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease — even more common than asthma. By the way, you heard

me right: tooth decay is *a disease*. It's not like a cold or a flu, which often goes away with time and bed rest. Like other diseases, tooth decay gets progressively worse unless it is treated. Of course, the *best* approach is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Within the past 5 years, studies have shown that children with dental problems are more likely to miss school and are more likely to earn below-average grades in school. But this isn't just about kids.

Adults will find it much harder to get a good job if they show up at an interview with unhealthy or missing teeth. In other words, the consequences of poor dental health can easily move *right from their mouths to their wallets*.

Now, for the good news. We have learned a lot about how to prevent cavities over the past 70 years. We've learned that protecting teeth is a lot like protecting passengers in cars. Sure — seatbelts are great, but should we do without airbags in cars? Should we drive without speed limits? It takes a multi-layered approach to protect passengers in a car, and it takes a multi-layered approach to protect teeth in a mouth.

Brushing with fluoride toothpaste is important. And so is eating a healthy diet by limiting sugar and carbohydrates. But fluoridated water is a *crucial part* of the approach to prevent cavities.

Don't take my word for it. Simply look at the research. Thousands of studies demonstrate the benefits and safety of fluoridated water. A number of those studies have been conducted within the past 5 years. For example, a Nevada study found that living in a community *without* fluoridated water was one of the three highest risk factors for dental problems. And a New York study compared low-income children in counties where fluoridation was prevalent with counties where it wasn't. The number of fillings, extractions and other dental treatments was *33% higher* for children in the less fluoridated counties.

The evidence is so strong that *all* leading health and medical organizations recommend fluoridation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — the CDC — endorses fluoridation. So does a long line of U.S. Surgeons General, regardless of the party of the president who appointed them. Fluoridation supporters include the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dental Association and the American Medical Association. [Mention your own affiliation/membership in these organizations, if appropriate.]

The list of supporters is very long. *In fact, there is no major, national medical or scientific organization that opposes it.*

Perhaps I could see someone questioning the safety or effectiveness of fluoridation if this were a brand-new idea. *But it isn't.* For 70 years, fluoridation has been used safely and effectively to reduce tooth decay. This made-in-America approach has been so successful that tens of millions of people are using it around the globe — in countries like Britain, Spain, Canada, Brazil, Ireland, Australia and Singapore.

Let's not kid ourselves. Ending water fluoridation would invite more tooth decay into our community where it would create more pain and more shame. Why on earth would we do such a thing?

I know you all have seen or heard a variety of claims made about fluoride. If you look into those claims, most of them can be traced back to a handful of websites. They look reputable, but if you scratch beneath the surface, you learn how unreliable and inaccurate they are.

I want to point out that 3 common claims opponents make have been examined by PolitiFact, an independent, non-partisan fact-checker. It found that all 3 of these claims were false or misleading.

Is fluoride safe? *You bet it is.* I say that not only as a [dentist, nurse, pediatrician, etc.], but as a father of two children. These days, parents like me have a lot of things to worry about, but I can say with confidence that fluoride is not one of them. If you all voted to end fluoridation, *that* would truly be something to worry about. Ending fluoridation would impose a hidden tax on many parents because they would need to make up for this missing source of fluoride by purchasing fluoride supplements for their kids and many more would have to pay the cost of the increased amount of dental care their children would require.

Most communities in the U.S. fluoridate their drinking water. They respect and follow the science. They value health and wellness. Ending fluoridation could portray our community as backward and behind the times. What effect could this have on local businesses? How could this change the way our community is viewed or perceived by others around the state? I'm proud of our community, and I would hate to see that happen.

Don't deprive the children and adults in this community of fluoridated water — something we know is safe and effective. *Please preserve fluoridation*, a “Made-in-America” practice that has improved health all across our country. Thank you.

[Or consider using the following text as your closing paragraph:]

Council members have an important decision to make. Will you stand with the most respected health and medical organizations? I certainly hope so. Fluoridation has made such a big difference in reducing dental problems. I support it, and I sure hope you will support it too. Thank you.

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