

FLUORIDES FACT SHEET

What are fluorides?

Fluorides occur naturally in the earth's crust where they are found in rocks, coal, clay and soil. Sodium fluoride is often added to the drinking water supply and to a variety of dental products, including toothpaste and mouth wash to prevent dental cavities.

How you can be exposed to fluoride?

Small amounts of fluorides are present in water, air, plants and animals. Therefore, it is not always known how you may be exposed to fluoride. You can be exposed through the water that you drink or if you use dental products, such as toothpaste, mouthwash, and topically applied gels that contain a lot of fluoride that's not intended to be ingested. If you work in industries where fluoride-containing substances are used, such as the electronics industry where hydrogen fluoride may be used to etch glass in TV picture tubes or to clean silicon chips and in aluminum and phosphate fertilizer plants.

What are the immediate symptoms of exposure to fluoride?

Small amounts of fluoride help prevent tooth cavities, but high levels can harm your health. Fluorine and hydrogen fluoride are very irritating to the skin, eyes, and respiratory tract. At high levels, such as may occur through exposure from an industrial accident, hydrogen fluoride may also damage the heart.

When used appropriately, fluoride is both safe and effective in preventing and controlling cavities.

What are the long-term health effects of exposure to fluoride?

In adults, exposure to high levels of fluoride can result in denser bones. However, if exposure is high enough, these bones may be more fragile and brittle and there may be a greater risk of breaking the bone. In children, drinking or eating excessive fluoride during the time teeth are being formed (before 8 years of age) can cause visible changes in teeth. This condition is called dental fluorosis. At very high concentrations of fluoride, the teeth can become more fragile and sometimes can break.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to higher-than-normal levels of fluorides?

If you think that you or your child has been exposed to a higher level of fluoride, contact your doctor for testing and treatment. **If you feel extremely ill, call 911 for medical attention. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

Where can I get more information on fluoride?

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)