

May 19, 2016

Ms. Madeline Drexler
Editor
Harvard Public Health
The Magazine of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Office for External Relations
90 Smith Street, Fourth Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02120

RE: "Is Fluoridated Drinking Water Safe?" article in *Harvard Public Health*, Spring 2016

Dear Ms. Drexler:

As alumni of the Harvard School of Public Health and as leading dental practice, education, and research associations, we were extremely disappointed that *Harvard Public Health* would publish an article titled "Is Fluoridated Drinking Water Safe?" in the Spring 2016 issue.

First of all, the answer is an unequivocal "Yes!" Second, the article was filled with misleading and incorrect statements and failed to reach out to any oral health experts, many of whom could have been found next door at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. Ironically, the article was published in the "State of the Science" section of the magazine, but was anything but.

To clarify the misleading and incorrect statements in the article:

- There is no "mounting" evidence that "the potential risks from consuming fluoridated water may outweigh the benefits for some individuals."
- It is misleading to state that "the U.S. Public Health Service lowered its recommended levels of fluoride in drinking water" without clarifying that the guidance changed a 1962 Drinking Water Standard recommendation from a range of 0.7 ppm to 1.2 ppm to a point recommendation of 0.7 ppm. The same guidance also reaffirmed that community water fluoridation remains an effective public health strategy for delivering fluoride to prevent tooth decay, and is the most feasible and cost-effective strategy for reaching entire communities.¹
- It is misleading to state that "Many experts now question the scientific basis for that decision" [referring to the decision to fluoridate water]. There are many more experts that validate that decision. The current U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, recently reaffirmed community water fluoridation as one of CDC's "10 Great Public Health Achievements of the 20th Century."²
- The Cochrane Collaboration did not find that water fluoridation "does not appear to have any benefits in adults"; rather, the review did not identify any evidence, meeting the

¹ U.S. Public Health Service recommendation for fluoride concentration in drinking water for the prevention of dental caries. *Public Health Reports*, July-August 2015.

² Murthy, Vivek H.: Surgeon General's Perspectives: Community water fluoridation: One of CDC's 10 great public health achievements of the 20th Century. *Public Health Reports*, July-August 2015.

review's strict inclusion criteria, to determine the effectiveness of water fluoridation for preventing caries in adults.³ A critique of the Cochrane review points out that the rigid inclusion criteria limited their ability to answer many of the important public health questions.⁴

- It is misleading to discuss high levels of fluoride in humans and animals in the context of water fluoridation. As has been known since the discovery linking naturally occurring fluoride in drinking water to lower levels of tooth decay, there is a dose response and an optimal range to prevent tooth decay and minimize dental fluorosis. The levels of fluoride that cause neurotoxicity in animals discussed in the article are several folds higher than community water fluoridation.

The Deans of the Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Dental Medicine, and Harvard School of Public Health all signed a letter of support for community water fluoridation in 2013.

The article is so misleading that we believe a full retraction of the article is in order. It is not salvageable by publishing subsequent corrections in future issues and should be removed from the online site. Further, equal time should be provided to perhaps colleagues at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine to provide an accurate "State of the Science."

Sincerely,



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³ Water fluoridation for the prevention of dental caries (Review). The Cochrane Collaboration. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. © 2015.

⁴ Rugg-Gunn, A.J., et al.: Critique of the review of 'Water fluoridation for the prevention of dental caries' published by the Cochrane Collaboration in 2015. *British Dental Journal* 335-340, 2016.