

PEW

**Defeating the Doubt Virus:**  
Effective Advocacy for Water Fluoridation

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*Johnny Johnson, pediatric dentist*

*Bill Smith, Pew & Hager Sharp consultant*

*Matt Jacob, Pew Children's Dental Campaign*



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# What happens here affects oral health



## The scorecard on water fluoridation

### Where We Have Lost:

- Harvard, NE
- Romulus, NY
- Wichita, KS
- Smithville, MO
- Olivehurst, CA
- St. Croix Falls, WI
- Bourbon, IN
- Amesbury, MA
- Balsam Lake, WI
- Graham, NC
- Bassett, NE
- Myerstown, PA
- Palisades, CO
- Lawrenceburg, TN
- Hartland Twp., MI
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## Where We Have Won:

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- Newcastle, ME
- Philomath, OR
- Sacramento, CA
- Tarpon Springs, FL
- Arkansas (state law)
- Milwaukee, WI
- Phoenix, AZ
- Pinellas Park, FL
- Plant City, FL
- Waupaca, WI
- McKinney, TX
- Naples, FL
- Portland, OR
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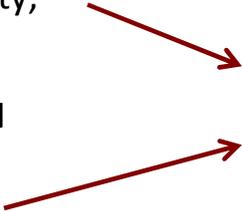
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## It's time to put on our gloves

- Let's take the lead as oral health professionals
- These are *our* communities and *our* states. We will not allow a small band of people to deprive us of a health practice that we **know** protects teeth.
- Being “right” isn't enough to win. We can win, but only if we follow a smart strategy.





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## Meet two anti-fluoridationists



Rita

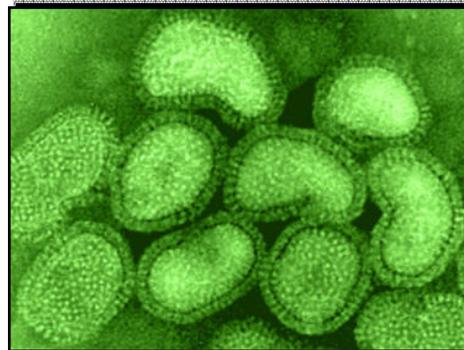
Zeta

# **The Challenge We're Facing**

## Two viruses with a lot in common



**The Doubt Virus**



**The Flu Virus**

- Both viruses tend to infect some communities more than others
- Both viruses can appear quite suddenly — without warning
- Prevention is the ideal and best approach

# Defeating the doubt virus

## 3 Keys to our Strategy

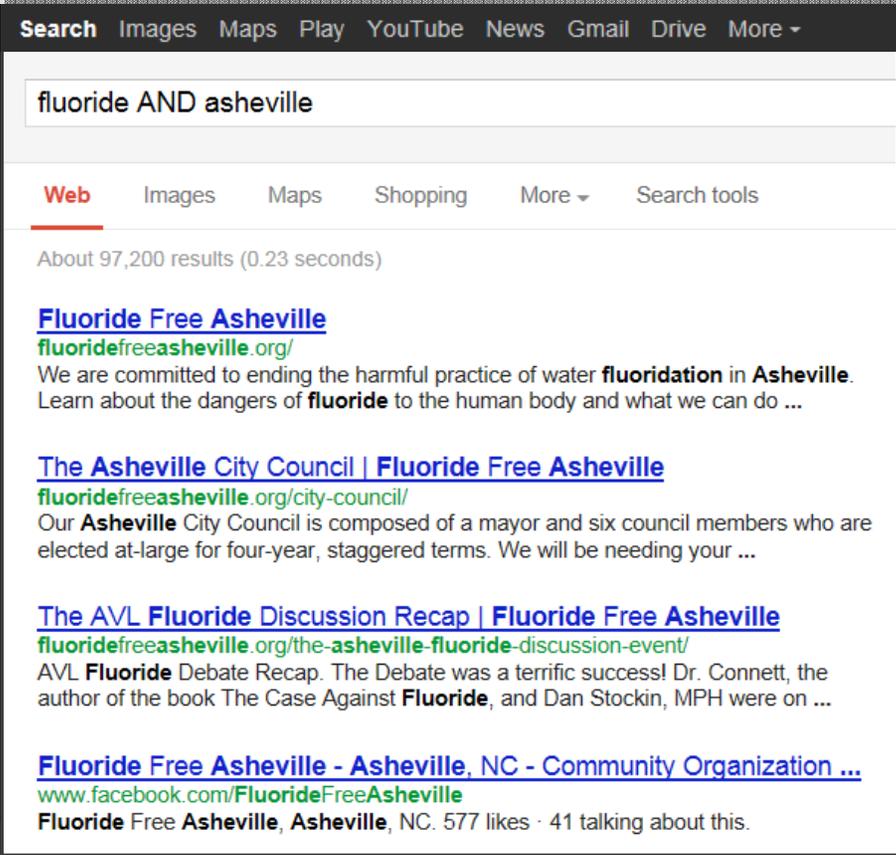
**Surveillance** – Monitor our states and communities so we know where this virus is most likely to threaten fluoridation

**Prevention** – Educate the decision makers in our communities before the virus takes hold

**Treatment** – Move quickly to contain the virus by educating the key stakeholders in our communities and mobilizing them to help preserve fluoridation



## Surveillance: what to look for



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fluoride AND asheville

Web Images Maps Shopping More ▾ Search tools

About 97,200 results (0.23 seconds)

[Fluoride Free Asheville](#)  
[fluoridefreeasheville.org/](http://fluoridefreeasheville.org/)  
We are committed to ending the harmful practice of water **fluoridation** in **Asheville**. Learn about the dangers of **fluoride** to the human body and what we can do ...

[The Asheville City Council | Fluoride Free Asheville](#)  
[fluoridefreeasheville.org/city-council/](http://fluoridefreeasheville.org/city-council/)  
Our **Asheville** City Council is composed of a mayor and six council members who are elected at-large for four-year, staggered terms. We will be needing your ...

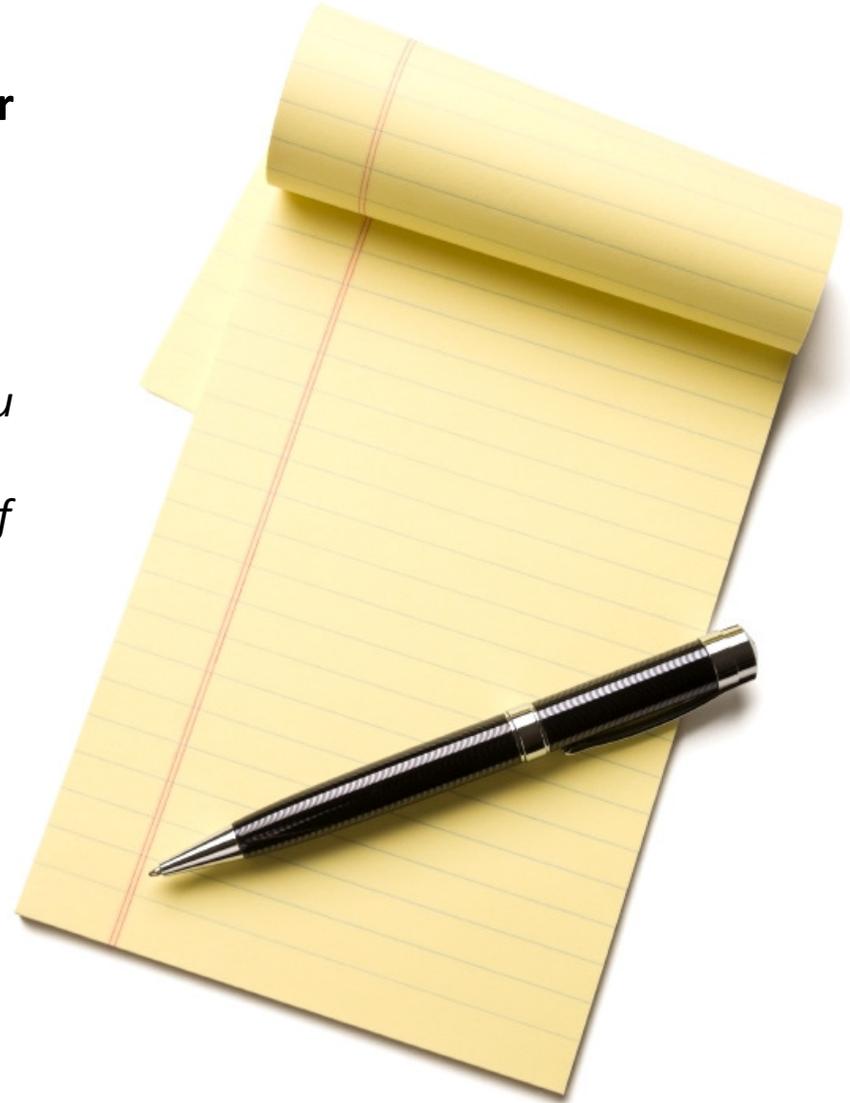
[The AVL Fluoride Discussion Recap | Fluoride Free Asheville](#)  
[fluoridefreeasheville.org/the-asheville-fluoride-discussion-event/](http://fluoridefreeasheville.org/the-asheville-fluoride-discussion-event/)  
AVL **Fluoride** Debate Recap. The Debate was a terrific success! Dr. Connett, the author of the book *The Case Against Fluoride*, and Dan Stockin, MPH were on ...

[Fluoride Free Asheville - Asheville, NC - Community Organization ...](#)  
[www.facebook.com/FluorideFreeAsheville](http://www.facebook.com/FluorideFreeAsheville)  
**Fluoride Free Asheville, Asheville, NC.** 577 likes · 41 talking about this.

- Do a Google search of **fluoride** and your community or state. See what turns up.
- Have you seen letters to the editor of a local newspaper raising concern about fluoride?
- Are you hearing more patients ask questions about fluoridated water? (*Consider raising the issue to see what your patients know about fluoridation.*)

## Your “to do” list

- 1. Identify the health/science reporter for the newspaper in your area.**
  - *Have they written much on dental issues?*
  - *Are there any events or reports you could use as an excuse for contacting them and having a brief conversation?*



## Your “to do” list

1. Identify the health/science reporter for the newspaper in your area.
2. **Contact at least 3 people and have a brief conversation about this topic:**
  - *Another dentist*
  - *A physician or pediatrician*
  - *A teacher, school nurse or school administrator*



## Your “to do” list

1. Identify the health/science reporter for the newspaper in your area.
2. Contact at least 3 people and have a brief conversation about this topic.
3. **Develop a list of the decision-makers in your community who decide when or if to fluoridate:**
  - *Is it a city council or a water board?*



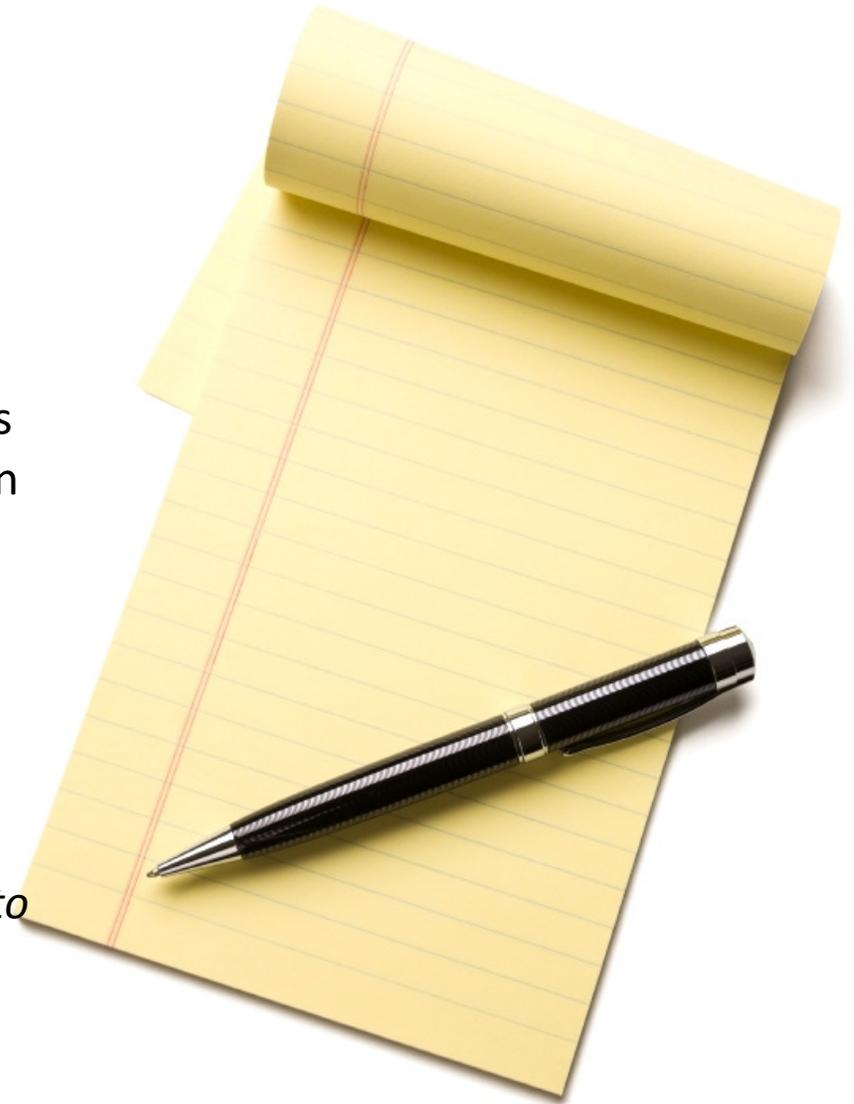
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2. Contact at least 3 people and have a brief conversation about this topic.
3. Develop a list of the decision-makers in your community who decide when or if to fluoridate.
4. **Identify the dynamics in your community that may shape how people perceive fluoridation:**
  - *Your community’s dental health*
  - *Environmental activists*
  - *Tea Party groups*
  - *NAACP or other minority groups*



## Your “to do” list

1. Identify the health/science reporter for the newspaper in your area.
2. Contact at least 3 people and have a brief conversation about this topic.
3. Develop a list of the decision-makers in your community who decide when or if to fluoridate.
4. Identify the dynamics in your community that may shape how people perceive fluoridation.
5. **Define your role:**
  - *What are you willing and able to do?*



**Framing the Issue,  
Making a Connection**



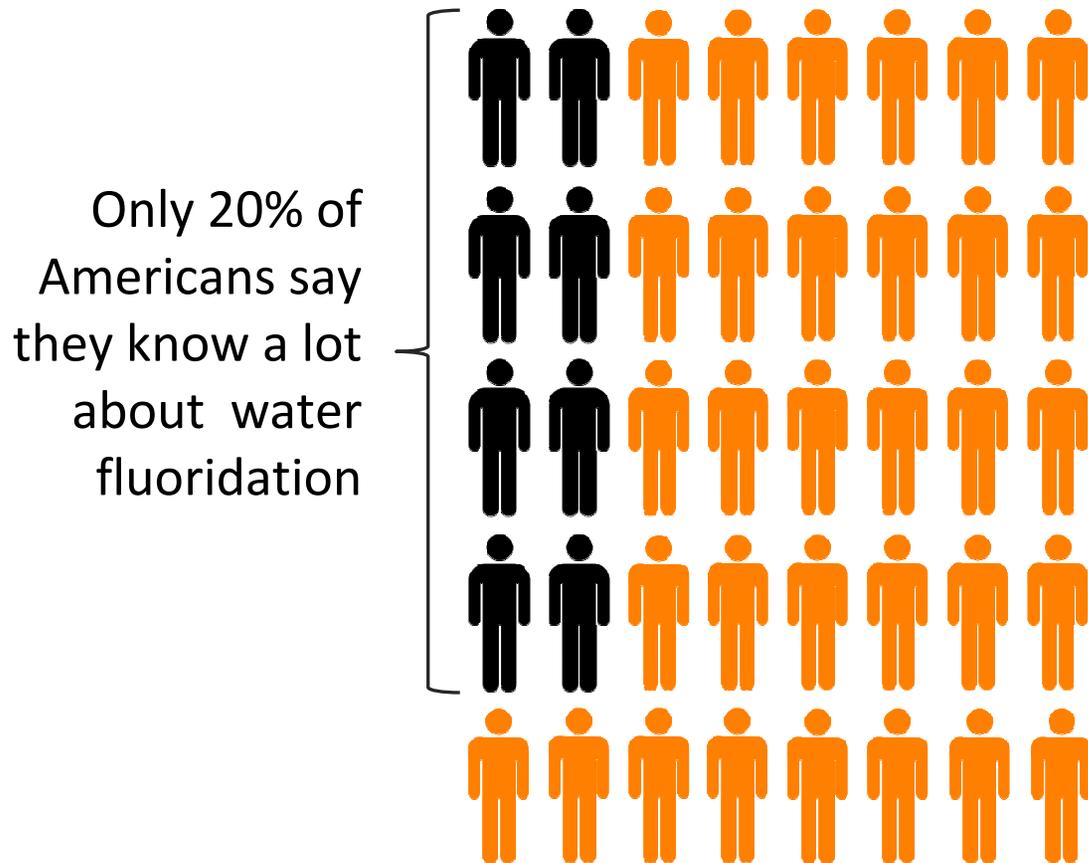
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## Consider your audience

We are not talking to science geeks



# The public is in the dark



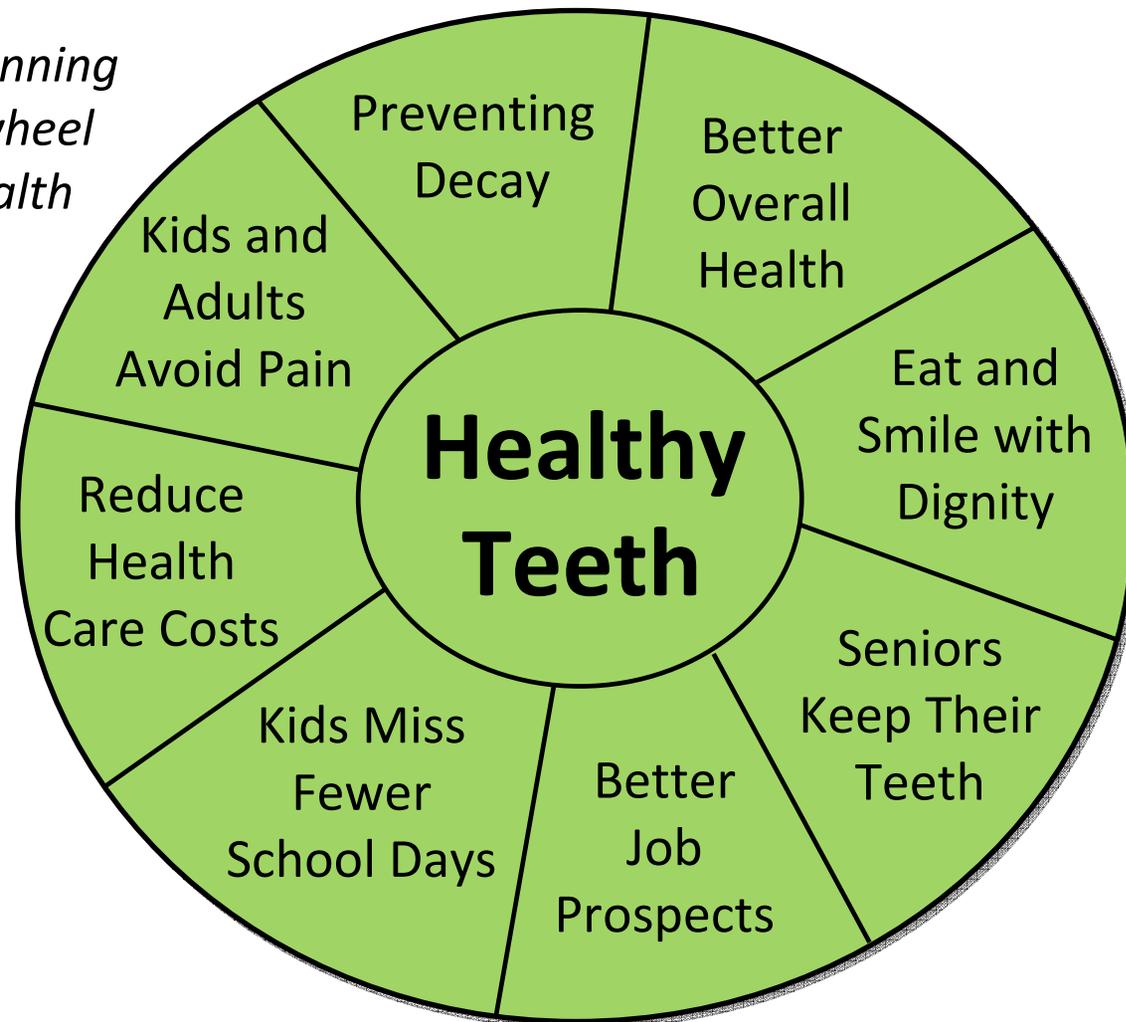
## 1. Begin by focusing on teeth

- Talk about why healthy teeth matter:
  - ✓ *They affect children's ability to attend school and perform well*
  - ✓ *They affect adults' ability to be productive and find good jobs*
  - ✓ *They affect everyone's overall health, self-confidence and quality of life*
- Give the public a reality check:
  - ✓ *Decay is less of a problem than it used to be, but it's still a problem*
  - ✓ *Fluoridation is a way to get a proven form of prevention to everyone — regardless of age, income, race or insurance status*



# 1. Begin by focusing on teeth

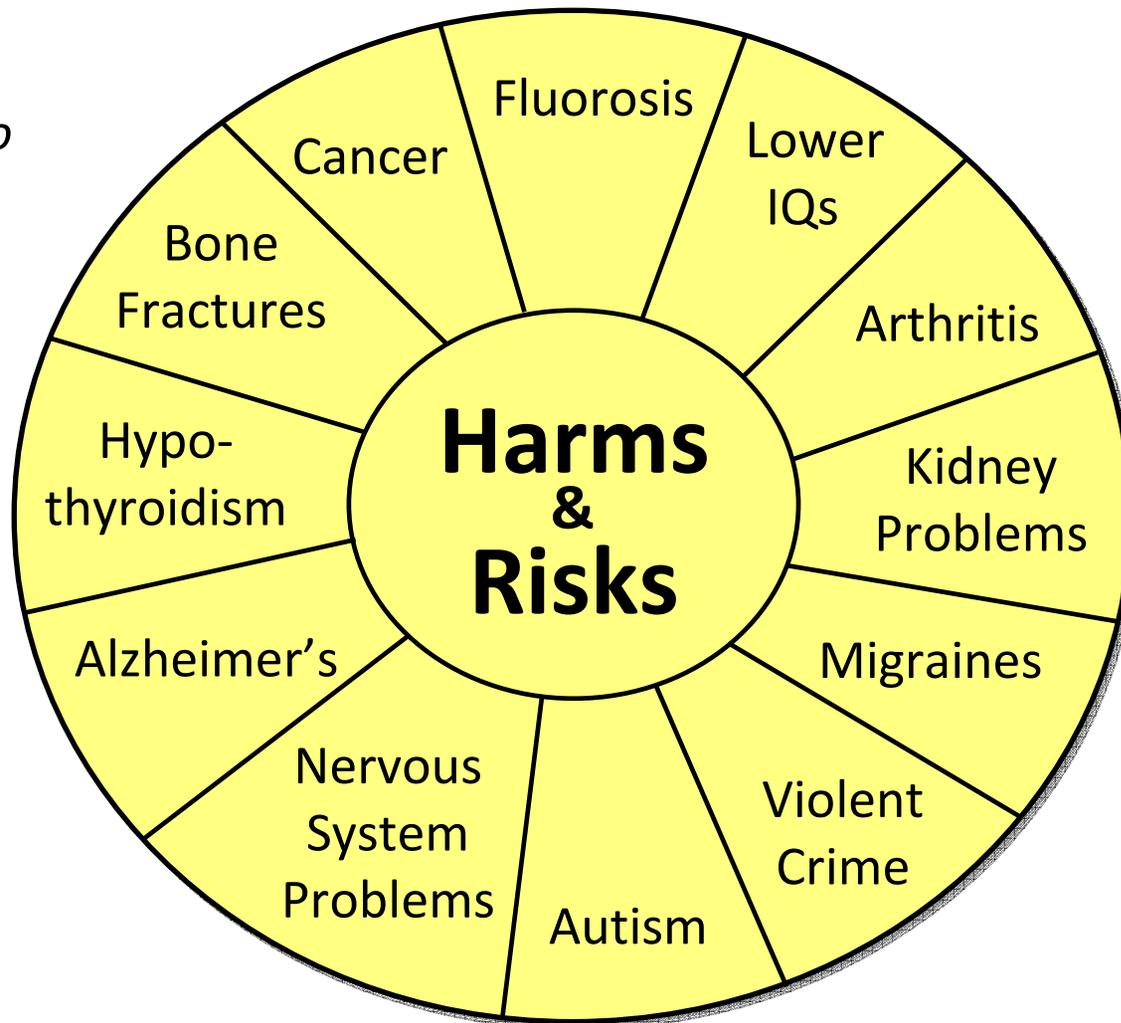
*This is a winning message wheel for oral health advocates*





# 1. Begin by focusing on teeth

*Opponents are likely to win if the dialogue is trapped inside this message wheel*

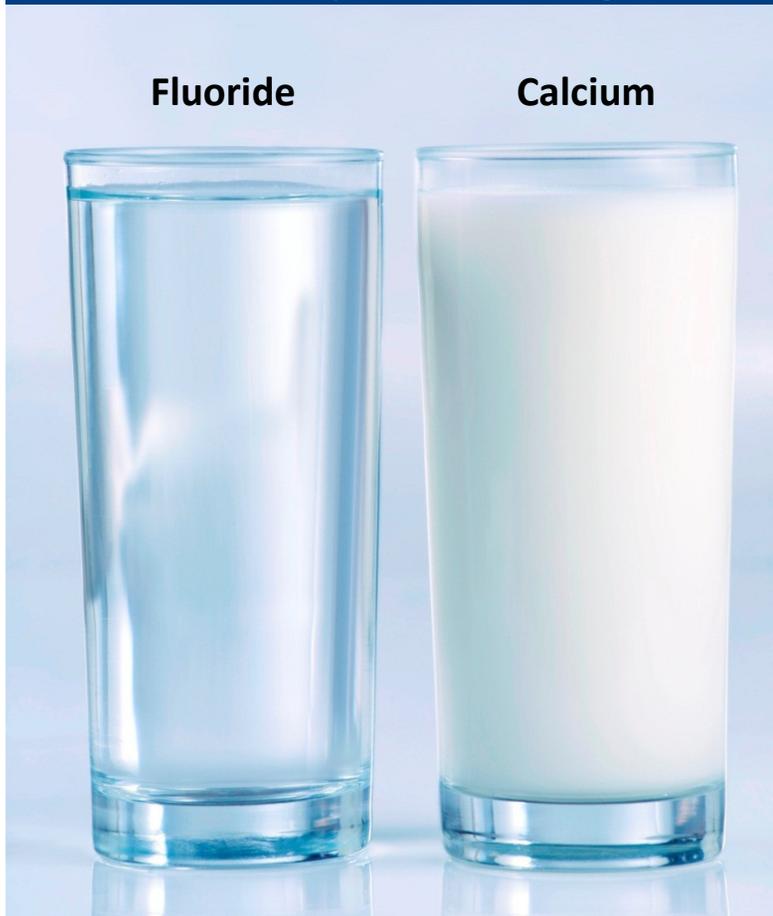


## 2. Listen to yourself



- Avoid clinical terms that put distance between you and your audience:
  - ✓ *Use cavities instead of “caries”*
  - ✓ *Use fillings instead of “restorations”*
- Avoid terms that raise fears or clash with deeply held values:
  - ✓ *Opponents use “fluoride chemicals” because they think these words make fluoridation sound scary*
  - ✓ *Fluoridation is a “health practice” instead of a “health intervention”*

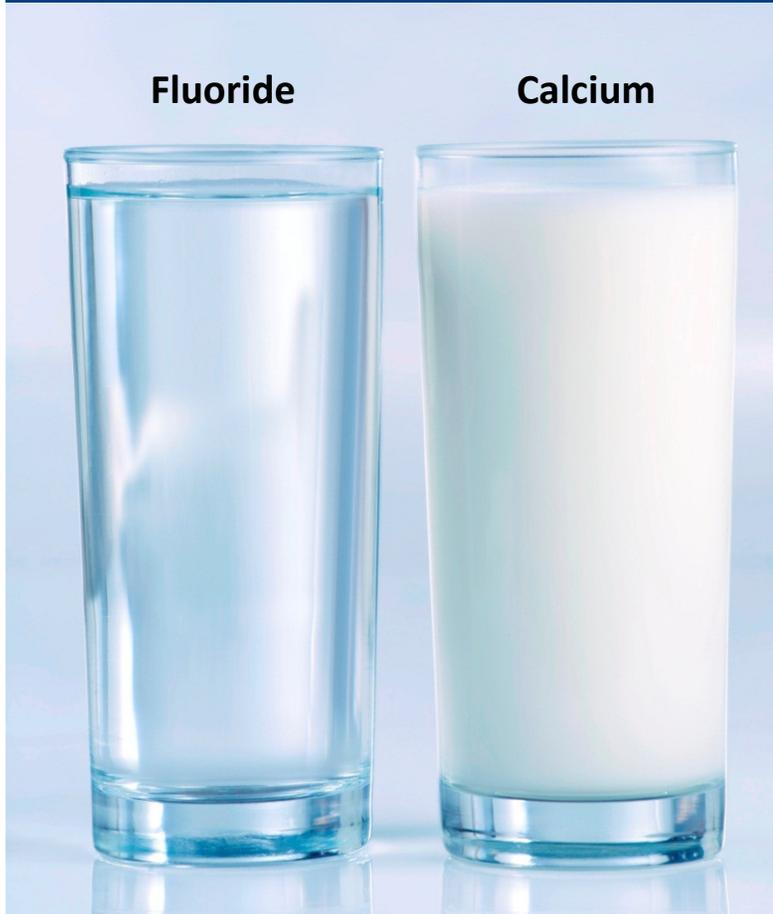
### 3. Use helpful analogies



Using a good analogy can make it easier for listeners to understand what you mean:

- ✓ *Both calcium and fluoride are minerals that are proven to benefit health.*
- ✓ *Like calcium, fluoride can have negative health effects only if it is consumed at extremely high levels — levels that virtually no one consumes.*

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**Some analogies don't work.**  
Test your analogy on friends or colleagues before using it.



## 4. Tell an interesting story



Using a story to share your values and connect with your audience:

### The Pine Island Eagle



To the editor:

As a mother of four children, a practicing local dentist and a concerned citizen, I am writing to express my professional and personal experience with the effects of fluoride or lack of fluoride, in our water.

I have read the scientific papers and I have heard the arguments both in favor and against fluoridation. Most of us have access to this information today on the Internet, but what really convinced me of the benefits of fluoride was my three years working in Mayo, Fla. Mayo is a small community with no fluoridated city water. Despite our huge efforts on oral health education and nutrition starting at pre-kindergarten ages, the magnitude of rampant decay I saw was like none I have ever seen since living in fluoridated cities.

I still remember the many children as young as 3 years of age that would come see me with an abscess, pain and swollen face and have to have multiple teeth pulled



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Using a story to share your values and connect with your audience:

She is a parent.

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She is a parent.

She has examined what both sides have to say.

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## 4. Tell an interesting story

Using a story to share your values and connect with your audience:

She is a parent.

She has examined what both sides have to say.

She has worked as a dentist in a community *without* fluoridated water and has seen the impact first-hand.

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## 5. Stress the solid consensus of experts

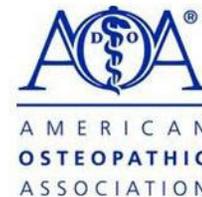
Make sure your audience knows that the leading health and medical organizations endorse community water fluoridation



Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE  
THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES



## Using the R-P-F Approach To Respond to Attacks:

*1. Response*

*2. Pivot*

*3. Finish*



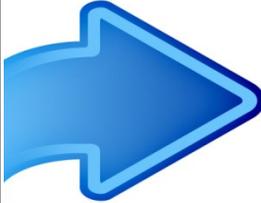
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“Let me talk to you about those 27 studies. There were a lot of issues with the methodology of those studies. For example, the authors of those studies did not adjust for confounding factors. And they could not provide actual exposures for each child.

“The levels of fluoride used in those studies are irrelevant to the way fluoridation is practiced in the U.S. Fluoride does *not* lower IQ scores.”

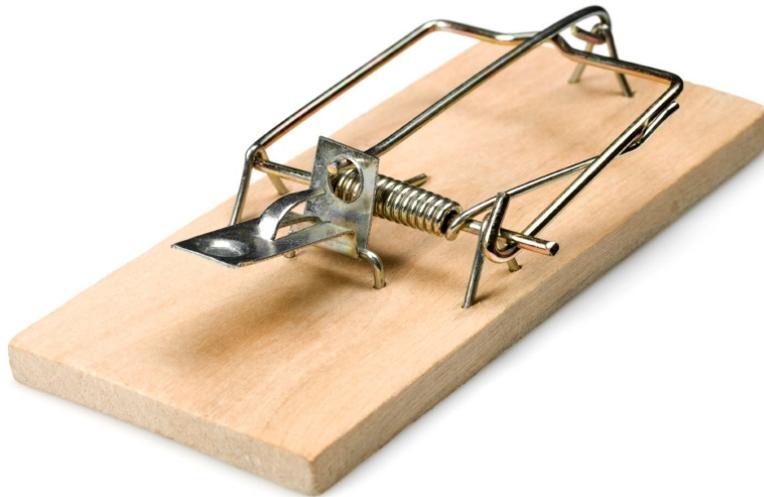
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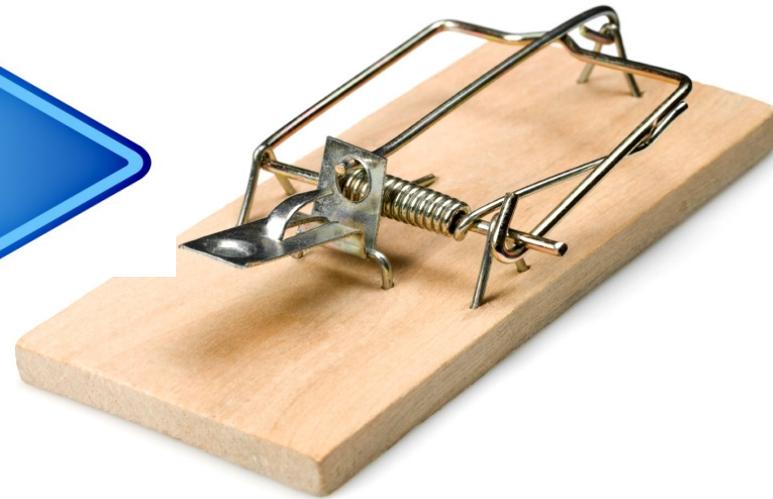
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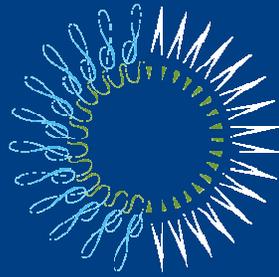
### 3. Finish

“If there were any doubts about the safety of fluoridated water, it wouldn't be endorsed by all of the leading health and medical organizations, including the CDC, the American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.”

## Our 4 best messages



1. Fluoridated water protects teeth by reducing the rate of decay by 25% over a person's lifetime. Having healthy teeth affects the quality of our lives in so many ways — from adults going to job interviews to children trying to learn in school.
2. All of the leading, most respected health and medical organizations support water fluoridation. These include the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC.
3. We have been fluoridating drinking water in the U.S. for nearly 70 years. That experience (and hundreds of studies) demonstrates the safety and effectiveness of fluoridation.
4. Research shows that every dollar invested in water fluoridation saves \$38 by reducing the need for fillings and other costly dental treatments.



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[www.pewstates.org/dental](http://www.pewstates.org/dental)



**Campaign for Dental Health**

[www.iLikeMyTeeth.org](http://www.iLikeMyTeeth.org)