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## **Dental hygienists support water fluoridation for optimal cavity prevention**

As more and more dental hygienists start their own mobile businesses and clinics across Ontario, their primary concerns are improving access to oral health and preventing tooth decay and gum disease.

The use of fluoride, a natural substance present in most food and water, plays an important role in prevention, according to the Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA), which represents close to 6,000 members in the province.

“Dental caries is ranked as the most prevalent global disease even though we have witnessed a significant reduction over the past several decades,” said ODHA Executive Director Margaret Carter. “Tooth decay, left untreated, can lead to tooth loss, gum disease and other diseases throughout the body.”

ODHA supports water fluoridation as the best way to provide fluoride protection to a large number of people at low cost, eliminating the barriers of individual income or access to routine dental care.

“Where fluoride has been added to municipal water supplies, there has been a marked decline in tooth decay rates. Fluoride is proven to be a safe, effective and economical way of preventing and even reversing the stages of tooth decay,” said Carter, facts that are well documented in research studies and reports from Health Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, the World Health Organization as well as several Canadian and American dental organizations.

Fluoride works by strengthening or remineralizing tooth enamel to prevent cavities from starting, to reduce the size and number of cavities, and to decrease tooth sensitivity. People of all ages need fluoride. Children need fluoride protection while their teeth are developing. Adults also require fluoride since the possibility of decay in the roots of teeth increases with age.

In addition to water and food, fluoride is found in consumer products such as toothpaste and rinses, and professional applications of gels, foams and varnishes.

Dental hygienists work with individuals to keep their teeth and mouths healthy. An assessment of fluoride sources and optimum levels in order to avoid overexposure, and a thorough clinical examination is required before embarking on a specific course of fluoride treatment, which, if recommended, dental hygienists will provide or customize a homecare program. In addition to clinical assessments, dental hygienists educate clients on fluoride and other ways to maintain good oral health as well as provide sources for more information.

Established in 1963, ODHA achieved independence for the profession in September 2007, enabling dental hygienists to work outside the dental office. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario, all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and effective healthcare.

**Contact:           The Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association**  
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