

Board of Directors

Charles A. Abbick, DDS
Salina Family Healthcare Center

Tami Allen
Families Together, Inc.

Melanie Simmer-Beck, PhD, RDH
UMKC School of Dentistry

Veronica Byrd
Parents as Teachers Pine Ridge

Kent Haverkamp, MD
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas

Davette McCoy, MHS, RDH, ECP III
Kansas Dental Hygienists' Assoc.

Debra Meisenheimer, BS, MS, CPC

Trina Morgan
Kansas Children's Service League

Debra Pochop
Rawlins County Dental Clinic

Michelle Ponce
Association of Community Mental
Health Centers of Kansas

Kevin Robertson, MPA, CAE
Kansas Dental Association

Linda J Sheppard, JD
Kansas Health Institute

Preddis Sullivan, DDS
Delta Dental of Kansas

Shannon Uehling
Sunflower Health Plan

Abilene City Commission
May 13, 2024

Mayor Rein and members of the City Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas, Inc. We are the statewide consumer oral health advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the importance of lifelong oral health by shaping policy and educating the public.

Community water fluoridation has a long history in this country, and it has a long history in Abilene. For over a quarter of a century, the city of Abilene has invested in the oral health of the community's residents. This means a generation of people have grown up in this community with the chance to be as healthy as possible.

Fluoride is found in all sources of water. Community water fluoridation is the practice of simply adjusting the amount of fluoride in the water to the optimal level needed to reduce tooth decay and protect health. People need fluoride in two different ways – systemically and topically. Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste and getting a fluoride treatment in the dental office are how people get topical fluoride. Community water fluoridation is how people get fluoride systemically. When people drink optimally fluoridated water, they strengthen their teeth from within. Children especially benefit from systemic fluoride because it helps strengthen their teeth as they are still forming. Both sources of fluoride are needed in order to get the optimal protection.

It takes only a little bit of fluoride to get to the optimal level. That is why Abilene needs to add only a little fluoride to take the water from the natural level of about 0.3 mg/L to about 0.7 mg/L. The amount of fluoride needed to get to optimal is similar to a teaspoon of water in a swimming pool. The amount is tiny, but the effect is mighty. This is the reason the CDC named community water fluoridation one of ten great public health achievements of the 20th century, along with things like seatbelts in cars.

The people who are most at risk of poor oral health are children, older adults, people with disabilities, and people living in poverty. These are the populations who also benefit most from optimal levels of fluoride in a community's drinking water.

The data shows this to be true, especially for kids in Dickinson County. According to data from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the rate of children in non-fluoridated Solomon who need dental care urgently is nearly 50% higher than in fluoridated Abilene, and the rate in non-fluoridated Herington is closer to four times higher. Like Abilene, Salina's water is optimally fluoridated, and the rate of kids with urgent dental care needs in that city is virtually the same as in Abilene. Not fluoridating the water optimally in Abilene puts the community's children at risk for a lifetime of oral health problems. For example, the cities of Calgary and Edmonton in Canada both fluoridated their water and had similar rates of children with tooth decay. When Calgary stopped in 2011, the rate of kids with tooth decay was 146% higher than in Edmonton in just five years.

Oral health is not just about having a nice smile or pretty teeth. It's about health and the ability to learn and work. Kids who have dental pain cannot concentrate in school and miss school more often than kids without dental pain. People living in poverty have a hard time getting and keeping a job if they do not have good teeth. Ensuring the drinking water in Abilene is at the optimal level, as outlined in Ordinance 24-3449 is one of the best ways the city has to help kids concentrate and learn and help the entire community be as healthy as possible.

We urge the Abilene City Commission to preserve the city's long-standing practice of community water fluoridation by passing Ordinance 24-3449. You have done so much to make the health of your community a priority, and we ask you to continue the practice you began over a generation ago. The future generations will be grateful for your investment.

Sincerely,



Tanya Dorf Brunner

Executive Director

tdorf@oralhealthkansas.org