

Fluoride in water becoming less common

By Lizette Alvarez, New York Times

MIAMI – A growing number of communities are choosing to stop adding fluoride to their water systems, even though the federal government and federal health officials maintain their full support for a measure they say provides a 25 percent reduction in tooth decay nationwide.

Earlier this month, Pinellas County, on Florida's west coast, voted to stop adding fluoride to its public water supply after starting the program seven years ago. The county joins about 200 jurisdictions from Georgia to Alaska that have chosen to end the practice in the last four years, motivated both by tight budgets and by skepticism about its benefits.

Eleven small cities or towns have opted out of fluoridating their water this year, including Fairbanks, Alaska, which acted after much deliberation and a comprehensive evaluation by a panel of scientists, doctors and dentists. The panel concluded that in Fairbanks, which has relatively high concentrations of naturally occurring fluoride, the extra dose no longer provided the help it once did and may, in fact, be harmful.

It is a view that also was shared by four out of seven commissioners in Pinellas County who first raised the proposal as a cost cutting measure.

"I'm in opposition to putting a medical treatment into the public drinking water supply without a vote of the people who drink that water," said Norm Roche, a newly elected Republican county commissioner who spent 10 years doing policy research for the county Water Department and who led the turnaround effort. "We had a dozen to 15 doctors, dentists, dental

hygienists and chemists here who want us to continue this practice but who could not agree themselves on how best to use fluoride.”

Some 700,000 people – 75 percent of the county – will be affected by the vote. The rest receive water from a different source.

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