

## **Mercury News editorial: Santa Clara Valley Water District board shows courage in approving fluoride**

Mercury News Editorial

Posted: 11/24/2011 08:00:00 PM PST

It's never easy to stand up to strident opposition, even to do what's right. So hats off to the Santa Clara Valley Water District board for voting unanimously this month to fluoridate its water.

While opponents of fluoride link it to everything from pitted teeth to the Manhattan Project, scientific study supports its success in dramatically reducing cavities for children and dental deterioration for the elderly. That's why a wide range of community groups came out to support the cause, including FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, PACT, the Health Trust, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group and county public health officials.

They'll have to do more than advocate, however. Fluoridation will cost up to \$9.5 million to set up and \$863,000 a year for operations -- and the water district board is counting on help to raise the money. Given other demands on its budget, including dams that need reinforcing, it's reasonable to make fluoridation a public-private partnership. The Health Trust and FIRST 5 are among those committed to helping find the funds.

Only a few communities in Santa Clara County, such as Palo Alto, have fluoridated water. While San Jose puts fluoride in its municipal water system serving newer parts of the city, most is served by private suppliers that do not. As a consequence, it's the largest city in the nation without fully fluoridated water.

Based on a survey by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, 48 percent of children between ages 2 and 4 here have had cavities, compared with only 18 percent of the same age nationwide. In East San Jose, the Children's Dental Center treats heartbreaking cases, with kids younger than 12 needing multiple root canals. This creates huge, unnecessary public costs. It also handicaps children in school: Ever try to grasp a new concept in math with a throbbing toothache?

The water board has made mistakes over the past decade, but an infusion of new leadership in the last election is making a difference. The courageous vote to take on fluoridation is a welcome example.

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