FLUORIDATION OF OUR WATER

There is new legislation (LB245) requiring Nebraska towns serving 1,000 or more people to fluoridate the drinking water supply UNLESS communities have naturally occurring fluoride at the optimum concentration, or they opt out through a ballot vote. As a result, several Nebraska communities will put this issue on the November ballot this fall including three communities in Saline County. The deadline to comply is by June 1, 2010. Communities in Saline County affected by the new legislation are Crete, Friend and Wilber and they will have this issue on the November ballot. These towns currently do not add fluoride to the water.

Examples of towns that currently fluoridate water in Southeast Nebraska include Adams, Beatrice State Developmental Center, Cook, Fairbury, Little Blue NRD RWD #1, Falls City, Richardson County RWD #2, Salem, Verdon, Rulo, Hallam, Hickman, Lincoln, Louisville, Stella, Superior, Syracuse, Tecumseh, and Johnson County RWD #1 East.

To address this issue, UNL Extension has updated the NebGuide "Drinking Water: Fluoride." The revised NebGuide includes the latest research-based information on fluoride in drinking water, a list of communities that currently fluoridate their water or have naturally occurring fluoride, information describing the legislation that was passed, information on general design requirements and approximate costs to fluoridate a water supply and more. You can find this at: www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1376/build/g1376.pdf. I feel the NebGuide will help citizens vote on the issue.

Fluoride is a naturally occurring element and exists in combination with other elements as a fluoride compound and is found as a constituent of minerals in rocks and soil in Nebraska. When water passes through and over soil and rock formations containing fluoride it dissolves these compounds, resulting in the small amounts of soluble fluoride present in virtually all water sources to towns in Nebraska.

In addition to naturally occurring fluoride, some communities add fluoride to the public water supply, a process known as fluoridation. Nationally, about two-thirds of Americans served by public water systems receive fluoridated water, according to the American Dental Association, but drinking water fluoridation can be controversial.

Opponents argue it violates individual rights and goes against religious beliefs that ban medication. The courts have ruled fluoridation is not an unconstitutional invasion of religious freedom or other individual rights guaranteed by the First, Fifth or 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The position of the courts is that a significant government interest in health and public welfare generally overrides individual objections to public health regulation. Opponents also argue that drinking fluoridated water promotes a variety of physical and mental ailments. Since the 1930's, many scientific studies have shown that water fluoridation, at the optimum concentrations recommended for good oral health, has no known harmful effects.
Although low levels of fluoride are beneficial, research shows that excessive amounts can be harmful. Fluoride in drinking water above optimum levels may produce fluorosis (mottling of teeth).

The dental benefits from consuming water containing optimum levels of fluoride are well-documented. You can ask your doctor or dentist about this. At optimum levels, fluoride protects against tooth decay. The American Dental Association has stated that fluoride benefits people of all ages. For adults, fluoride helps repair the early stages of tooth decay even before it becomes visible, a process known as remineralization. For older adults, fluoride can decrease problems with root caries (decay along the gumline).

Make sure and read the ballot language closely when you vote this year in Wilber, Crete and Friend, and by all means, read the NebGuide available on the web or at the Extension office to help you make an informed decision. I have sent copies to the City Clerk’s offices for the public to have in all three Saline County communities.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465
Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu