

Enamel Fluorosis

Q: What is enamel fluorosis?

A: A child may face the condition called enamel fluorosis if he or she gets too much fluoride during the years of tooth development. Too much fluoride can result in defects in tooth enamel.

Q: Why is enamel fluorosis a concern?

A: Most cases of fluorosis are mild and will appear as tiny white specks or streaks that are often unnoticeable. However, in severe cases of enamel fluorosis, the appearance of the teeth is marred by discoloration or brown markings. The enamel may be pitted, rough, and hard to clean.

Q: How does a child get enamel fluorosis?

A: By swallowing too much fluoride for the child's size and weight during the years of tooth development. This can happen in several different ways. First, a child may take more of a fluoride supplement than the amount prescribed. Second, the child may take a fluoride supplement when there is already an optimal amount of fluoride in the drinking water. Third, some children simply like the taste of fluoridated toothpaste. They may use too much toothpaste, then swallow it instead of spitting it out.

Q: How can enamel fluorosis be prevented?

A: Talk to your pediatric dentist as the first step. He or she can tell you how much fluoride is in your drinking water. (Your local water treatment plant is another source of this information.) If you drink well water or bottled water, your pediatric dentist can assist you in getting an analysis of its fluoride content. After you know how much fluoride your child receives, you and your pediatric dentist can decide together whether your child needs a fluoride supplement.

Watch your child's use of fluoridated toothpaste as the second step. A pea-sized amount on the brush is plenty for fluoride protection. Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste, not swallow it, after brushing.

Q: Should I just avoid fluorides for my child altogether?

A: No! Fluoride prevents tooth decay. It is an important part of helping your child keep a healthy smile for a lifetime. Getting enough -- but not too much -- fluoride can be easily accomplished with the help of your pediatric dentist.

Q: Can enamel fluorosis be treated?

A: Once fluoride is part of the tooth enamel, it can't be taken out. But the appearance of teeth affected by fluorosis can be greatly improved by a variety of treatments in esthetic dentistry. If your child suffers from severe enamel fluorosis, your pediatric dentist can tell you about dental techniques that enhance your child's smile and self-confidence.