Flouride rich baby food under fire from scientists

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI
NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: Scientists in the US have warned of the risks of exposing young children to large amounts of flouride. In a study published in the October edition of the Journal of the American Dental Association they claim that an increased intake of the mineral from drinking water, dentifrice, infant powder products or beverages can lead to a higher risk of developing fluorosis, a condition that discolours and weakens teeth.

The findings confirm earlier evidence indicating a link between dental fluorosis and greater intake of flouride in early life. The latest study, conducted by researchers from the University of Iowa in the United States, found that a greater flouride intake from reconstituted powder, a popular choice for infant food in the US, and other beverages with added water increased fluorosis risk in children between the ages of three and nine months. They suggested avoiding the ingestion of additional flouride through consumption of these mixtures in order to reduce the prevalence of the condition nationwide.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-third of children between the ages of 12 to 15 years in the US suffer from some form of fluorosis. The country also has the highest occurrence of flouridated water in the world.
Alaska study supports employment of dental therapists

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI

NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany:
Dental therapists can offer ade-
quate dental health care to un-
der served populations, a US
study has found. The two-year
evaluation of a dental therapists
programme in the state of Alaska
supports the use of therapists to
perform basic dental procedures,
such as sealant placement and
filling preparation, to overcome the significant shortage of dental professionals in rural areas.

Dental therapists routinely
perform dentist tasks in many
countries, including Canada,
Australia, New Zealand and Sri
Lanka. Montana and Alaska are
the first US states to allow thera-
pists to provide higher dental
care. Therapists in Alaska have
been performing basic surgical
procedures under the supervi-
sion of dentists in remote native
villages since 2005.

While Alaska has a sufficient
number of dentists, according to
US government statistics, it fails
to provide adequate dental care
to its widely scattered native
population.

National and local dental as-
ociations in the US have criti-
cised the study. A speaker of the
American Dental Association
said that the model has not sam-
pled sufficient therapists to pro-
vide data that would justify the
generalisation of the model to
other states.

The organisation, which rep-
resents all dentists in the US, has
long rejected the idea of per-
mitting non-dentists to perform
surgical procedures.

New evidence links mercury to Alzheimer’s

Yvonne Bachmann
DTI

LEIPZIG, Germany:Dental pa-
tients with silver fillings are
more likely to suffer from senile
dementia of the Alzheimer’s
type. In a review published in
the latest Journal of Alzheimer’s
Disease, researchers associated
with universities in Boston (USA),
Freiburg/Breisgau and Frankfurt
(Oder), both in Germany, claim
that symptoms of the condition
were reproduced or accelerated
when brain tissue was exposed
to inorganic mercury, the main
ingredient of amalgam.

Earlier studies of low-dose
human exposure, such as to den-
tists and their staff, have shown
that exposure to mercury is cor-
related with long-term neuro-
logical or psychological harm.
The new review is one of the first
that has found a systematic link
between memory deficits and
increased levels of mercury found
in Alzheimer’s patients.

According to Prof. Harald Wa-
lach, Viadrina European Univer-
sity in Frankfurt (Oder), patients
with silver fillings are exposed
to 1 to 22 µg mercury per day, of
which the majority accumulates
in the brain. The metal binds with
selenium, a substance respon-
sible for preventing oxidative
stress, which can lead to cell death
and early ageing. Removing mer-
cury from medical and ecological
cycles could slow down cell death
and prevent the development of
dementia and possibly other
forms of neurological disorders,
including Parkinson, he added.

“The situation is similar to the
early 1970s regarding smoking:
substantial experimental evidence
existed, but human studies were
inconclusive at the time and
were under attack by groups with
a vested interest,” Prof. Walach
told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific.
“To wait until irrefutable evi-
dence has accumulated is not
the best option in view of what
we already know about the toxic
potential of mercury.”

Amalgam is still the most
common type of filling used by
dentists worldwide. It is banned
in Sweden and restricted in Nor-
way and Denmark.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann, DTI)
Fewer US Americans have dental insurance benefits

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI

NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: The recession is finally baring its teeth at dental patients in the US. The latest data released by the US National Association of Dental Plans (NADP) and dental service corporation Delta Dental Plans Association shows that almost ten million Americans lost or cancelled their dental insurance last year. The decrease is the first decline in dental benefit enrolment since 1994.

At the end of last year, slightly over 50 per cent of the US population or 166 million had some form of dental insurance and only one per cent had its benefits through individual policies. NADP representatives said that the 5.7 per cent dip in subscribers in some employee groups most likely reflects family financial constraints and layoffs. By contrast, enrolment from 2006 through 2008 grew in line with population growth holding steady at 57 per cent of the US population.

Unemployment in the country doubled in 2008, according to figures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, putting more than five million people out of work. Latest figures released by the department forecast no significant improvement in 2010.

Currently, Americans with dental benefits have an average spending of US$1,000 per year at their disposal. Dentists’ groups in the US have criticised the system, which they say only benefits insurance companies and limits patients in accessing much-needed treatment.

Worryingly, more than ten per cent of dentists aged 55 and over are already leaving public service each year. The BDA is concerned that the registration of dental practices with the Care Quality Commission in 2011 could exacerbate the problems that are already being seen, and drive many dentists into early retirement limiting patients access to dental care.

John Milne, Chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee, commented: “Morale amongst family dentists in England is becoming a real problem. My fear is that many of our most experienced practitioners, the dentists that families have relied on for generations, could feel so wrapped up in red tape that they simply choose to walk away. That would be a disaster.”

“The Government is taking steps to address the problematic contract that was introduced in 2006 and we are looking forward to an announcement of how new arrangements will be developed. But it’s also clear that red tape is becoming a major issue, with CQC registration a real concern for dentists. If the new contract is to be a success the Government must look at this carefully, untangle the red tape and free dentists to do what they are trained for—care.”

Lisa Townshend
DTI UK

LONDON, UK: The British Dental Association (BDA) warned that growing bureaucracy is destroying the morale of high street dentists in England and could be driving experienced practitioners to retire early or leave the National Health Service (NHS). According to their research, excessive administration is the primary factor behind a downturn in dentists’ confidence.

Nearly half of all high street dentists are reporting that their morale has fallen during the past twelve months. More than 60 per cent of those said that growing administration was to blame. Rising expenses and continuing problems with the 2006 dental contract, including a lack of time to provide preventive care to patients, were also cited as major factors in the declining confidence of the profession.

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