

Protecting Those Early Smiles

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A little fluoride goes a long way to fight tooth decay. In 2006, however, the American Dental Association, which has long trumpeted the benefits of fluoridated drinking water, issued an alert urging parents to steer clear of fluoridated water when preparing infant formula - especially bottled water marketed for babies.

In 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave manufacturers of bottled water the go-ahead to tout the toothy benefits of fluoride on their labels. According to the agency, a little fluoride - 0.6 to 1 milligram per liter - is beneficial.

Not for babies or young children, however. According to the FDA - and the ADA - exposure to excessive levels of fluoride when teeth are developing can permanently damage enamel. Research has also linked it to weakened bones and thyroid problems.

Excessive exposure occurs when infant formula, which already contains fluoride, is mixed with treated water from community supplies or bottled water - such as Nursery Water, the leading fluoridated water marketed for babies. Instead, the ADA recommends that parents feeding their babies powdered formula use ready-to-feed brands or mix the formula with untreated water, such as well water. Water labeled as purified, demineralized, deionized, distilled or reverse-osmosis filtered is also acceptable, the group says.

Occasional exposure to elevated levels of fluoride is not cause for concern, according to the dental association. Prolonged exposure, however, can be too much of a good thing. Copyright 2006, Hartford Cour