

Fluoride Varnish FAQ

Q1 – What is fluoride?

A1 – Fluoride is a naturally-occurring mineral found in soil, water and various foods.

Q2 – How does fluoride prevent tooth decay?

A2 – Fluoride helps to strengthen and solidify the enamel of the tooth. This improves a person's oral health by making teeth more resistant to decay. Fluoride can also reverse tooth decay over time.

Q3 - What is fluoride varnish?

A3 – Fluoride varnish is a protective coating brushed onto teeth. It helps prevent new cavities by making the tooth enamel harder. The fluoride varnish forms a sticky covering over the tooth and becomes hard as soon as saliva in the mouth touches it.

Q4 – Is fluoride varnish safe?

A4 – Fluoride varnish is safe. The use of fluoride varnish is approved and recommended by Health Canada and the Canadian Dental Association. Research shows fluoride varnish is very effective in preventing tooth decay in children and youth.

Q5 – Why is fluoride varnish recommended?

A5 – Fluoride varnish helps to reduce the risk of tooth decay in children. Tooth decay is one of the most common, yet preventable childhood diseases. Children can get cavities soon after their first baby teeth appear. Cavities in baby teeth may cause pain and prevent children from being able to properly eat, speak, sleep and learn.

Q6 – Why is the fluoride varnish program being provided in this area?

A6 – The Oral Health Department at the Health Unit is providing the fluoride varnish program free of charge to kindergarten students in Haliburton County, Northumberland County and City of Kawartha Lakes. Since fluoride is not added to any municipal drinking water system in these communities, local children do not receive the benefits of water fluoridation, which is safe and reduces tooth decay. The goal of the Health Unit's fluoride varnish program is to reduce local rates of childhood tooth decay.

Q7 – Where is fluoride varnish application offered?

A7 – Fluoride varnish is available at Health Unit clinics by appointment. The fluoride varnish program will be offered to Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten students in this area, with the application taking place at select schools.

Q8 – How is fluoride varnish applied?

A8 – Fluoride varnish will be brushed onto a child's teeth by the Health Unit's Oral Health staff. Since fluoride varnish sticks to the children's teeth, it is not being swallowed or ingested. It takes less than five minutes to apply varnish to a child's teeth.

Q9 – Is the fluoride varnish program offered in schools mandatory for children?

A9 – While fluoride varnish is recommended, this free program is voluntary. Parents/caregivers must fill out a consent form in order for their child to receive fluoride varnish. A child can stop participating in the program at any time.

Q10 – How often is fluoride varnish applied?

A10 – Fluoride varnish is most effective if applied at least two times per year, every year. For that reason, children taking part in the Health Unit's fluoride varnish program will receive two applications – one in the fall, and a second in the spring. Although it might seem unnecessary to get more than two applications of fluoride varnish per year, there is no harm in doing this. You may wish to let your dentist know that your child is receiving fluoride varnish at school

Q11 – What type of fluoride varnish product is used by the Health Unit?

A11 – The fluoride varnish product used by the Health Unit is called X-Pur (R trademark symbol) NaF White Varnish made by Oral Science. The product is approved for use in Canada. X-Pur (R trademark symbol) contains a medicinal ingredient (neutral sodium fluoride) and the following non-medicinal ingredients: ethyl alcohol, rosin, xylitol, watermelon flavor, mineral oil.

Q12 – What does the fluoride varnish taste and feel like?

A12 – The fluoride varnish used by the Health Unit is fruit flavoured. Your child's teeth may feel waxy or have a white streaky appearance for the day. After fluoride varnish is brushed onto a child's teeth, there is no restriction on eating and drinking.

Q14 – What is dental fluorosis? Is it a concern?

A14 – Dental fluorosis is a change in the appearance of teeth. It is caused when very young children digest too much fluoride over a long period of time. Since fluoride varnish is brushed on children's teeth and is not being swallowed and ingested, dental fluorosis is not a concern with the Health Unit's program.

(Sources: Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, Ontario Dental Association, Canadian Dental Association, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Update: March 2025