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## RFK Jr. wants fluoride out of drinking water. Israel has a decade of lessons to offer.

Since Israel's health minister decided in 2013 to stop requiring fluoridation, pediatric dental health has worsened.



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DECEMBER 24, 2024 3:47 PM



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TEL AVIV — Ilana Decker, who moved from Israel to New York three years ago, says she doesn't agree often with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Arguing, as he does, that the government should not make health mandates, she said, makes her "sound like an anti-vaxxer, which I'm not."

But there is one issue, she said, where she and Kennedy do line up: The man whom Donald Trump has picked as the next secretary of health and human services has publicly floated ending the decades-long policy of encouraging cities to inject fluoride into the American water supply.

Decker supports the change — and she's speaking from personal experience: Her former home, Israel, stopped fluoridating its water a decade ago.

"I hate to align with RFK Jr. in any way, shape, or form, but I really do agree that it should not be in the water," she said. Citing concerns about the risk to children, she even switched her 4-year-old to fluoride-free toothpaste, though she didn't rule out its use fully.

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The nomination of Kennedy, an anti-vaccine activist and harsh critic of government health agencies, has cast a spotlight on debates over the role the government should play in public health — and over the degree to which mounting distrust in science should guide policy-making.

Fluoridation offers a case study in those debates. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fluoridation in water has been shown to reduce cavities in children and adults by about 25% over a lifetime, with the organization dubbing it “one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.”



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would seek to end fluoridation on day one after taking office. (Water is managed locally, so the federal government can only advise and incentivize changes.) As with vaccines, he has said the use of fluoride should be up to individuals, not the government.

“I think fluoride is on its way out,” he said on NBC News shortly after Trump’s election last month. “I think the faster that it goes out, the better.”

Those same debates lay at the root of the decision in 2013 by Israel's health minister to end water fluoridation. Now, Israel's policy change could act as a case study for how defluoridation could affect Americans. And the discourse is ongoing, with Israeli public health experts and some parents agitating for fluoride to be reinserted in the water — citing worsening dental outcomes for children — at the very moment when the United States may move in the opposite direction.

“The success of water fluoridation serves as a beacon for public health in general, and by extension, opposition to it should serve as a warning,” said Shlomo Zusman, who served as Israel's chief dental officer for over two decades and was a vocal critic of the 2014 policy change.

He said modern water purification methods mean that fluoridation is far from the only way the modern water supply is altered. In addition, he noted that because 75% of Israel's potable water is desalinated, it has no natural fluoride levels at all.

“The idea that water without added fluoride is ‘natural,’ as if it comes straight from a spring, is mistaken — there's no such thing, it's all manipulated,” he said. Referring to a story in the Bible, he added “The days of Rachel pumping water from the well are long gone”

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and his followers, she also cited the importance of individual choice.

“All things considered, and balancing all the interests, I feel that continued massive fluoridation of 100% of the water was an incorrect act,” German wrote to an association of



pediatricians that was one of several groups to publicly oppose her plan. “And many even believe it infringes on fundamental rights and freedom of choice.”

The government that succeeded German’s term in office pledged to reintroduce fluoride — prompting legal action from German — but it has not been mandated again in Israel.

Since discontinuing fluoride in tap water, Israeli dentists have observed a significant rise in children’s cavities and have urged its reinstatement, even as some parents remain firmly against the idea.

A study published in September found a significant increase in dental restorations and crowns among Israeli children ages 3 to 5, attributing the rise to fluoride’s absence. The researchers, from the Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Dental Medicine, concluded that the results provided “further proof of the need to restore community water fluoridation in Israel.”

Another study, published in January 2022, analyzed six years of data from dental clinics affiliated with a national Israeli healthcare network, showing that children ages 3 to 12 required nearly double the number of restorative treatments compared to before fluoridation

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fluoridation. But dozens of municipalities across the United States have moved away from fluoride use in recent years, including some whose voters made the choice on Election Day last month.



Signs sprung up on roadsides urging a no vote on a referendum asking residents in seven Maine towns if they want to continue adding fluoride to drinking water in 2016. (Gregory Rec/Portland Portland Press Herald via Getty Images)

Most of Europe, meanwhile, has either dropped fluoridation or never introduced it in drinking

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Another, who identified herself as a teacher with 25 years of experience, agreed that there has been a significant decline in nutrition.

“I can say with 100% certainty that children’s diets have deteriorated immensely and it just so happens to coincide with the removal of fluoride,” she said.



Sweets for sale at Carmel Market (Shuk Ha'Carmel) in Tel Aviv, Dec. 30, 2022. (Beata Zawrzcel/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

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Recommended fluoride level in U.S. drinking water of 0.7 parts per million.

Another [study](#) from May of this year found that prenatal exposure to fluoride was linked to behavioral problems, with children of mothers in areas with higher fluoride concentrations showing symptoms of autism, anxiety and other disorders by age 3, though the authors stopped short of establishing causation.

Zusman dismissed many of the concerns about health risks as a fad.

“There was a time when they claimed fluoridation caused hip fractures, then cancer, and later stunted growth in boys” caused by osteosarcoma, he said. “Now the fashion is ADHD and IQ, so they blame fluoridation on that.”

He said that just like parents who oppose fluoridation, the issue is personal to him, too.

“Believe me, if there were serious, professional studies showing harm, I’d be the first to say, stop fluoridating the water,” he said. “I have eight grandchildren to think of.”

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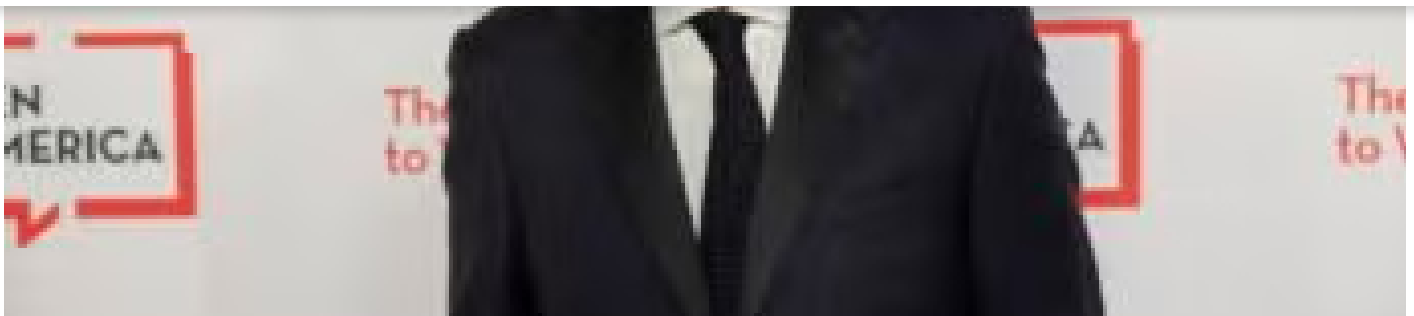


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