



Assuring Your Child's Dental Health

by Michael Fleming, DDS, PA

Dental decay continues to occur in children with alarming regularity – this despite the fact that it is largely preventable. When your child needs dental work to repair decayed teeth, it is very important to consider both what filling materials are appropriate and how to prevent a future recurrence of decay.

The three common concerns voiced by holistically oriented parents regarding restorative and preventive care in children have to do with filling materials that contain mercury; the use of fluoride for decay prevention; and whether or not tooth colored fillings contain BPA, a chemical found in a wide variety of plastics and resins. These areas of concern are often hotly debated among dental professionals and scientists. All of us want the safest and most effective dental products and treatment for our children, and parents need to be well informed about the choices available to them.

For decades, a mercury containing filling material known as dental amalgam was the standard of care for filling cavities in both adults and children. Today, amalgam does not

have to be used, and, in the opinion of increasing numbers of dentists, should not be used due to its mercury content. Children's teeth can be safely and effectively restored with modern tooth colored resin (composite) material and other biocompatible products with excellent clinical results.

There are also concerns about whether or not modern dental resins contain Bis-Phenol A (BPA), a common chemical constituent in plastics which has been found to cause small increases in estrogen levels. Of particular concern is the content of BPA in dental sealants. Current science informs us that BPA is generally not found in sealants or in the majority of composite resins used to fill teeth. In the very few instances where it may be found, the amounts seem well below harmful levels. The jury is still out on whether or not the more complex resins are estrogenic.

Finally, concerns about fluoride abound, whether it is added to the water supplies; consumed in food and beverages; or found in dental products of all kinds. While research studies generally support the effectiveness of

fluoride when applied topically to the teeth in very measured amounts, it may not be necessary for most of the pediatric population. The addition of fluoride to drinking water supplies remains very controversial, with proponents claiming dental benefits and opponents claiming it is a toxic and unnecessary additive. From a holistic point of view, fluoride consumption from all sources can and should be carefully controlled, especially in young children. Simply put, dental health can be maintained at a high level without the use of dental products containing fluoride.

The bottom line for parents? Ask the good questions of your dentist and expect thoughtful answers. Your child deserves the best and safest dental care available.

Dr. Fleming is an active Consultant to the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Devices and Radiologic Health and is the former Consumer Member on the FDA's Dental Products Panel and Circulatory System Devices Panel. The opinions expressed above do not necessarily reflect those of the FDA.