The American Dental Association recommends that persons drinking unfluoridated water use topical and/or systemic fluoride as alternative means to help reduce tooth decay.

**Topical fluorides** strengthen teeth already present in the mouth and make them more decay-resistant. Topical fluoride application can also repair early decay of tooth enamel by promoting remineralization of the enamel. Topical fluorides include toothpaste, mouth rinses, and professionally applied fluoride therapies. **Systemic fluorides** are ingested into the body and become incorporated into forming tooth structures. Systemic fluorides can also give topical protection because systemic fluoride is present in saliva which bathes the teeth, and thus offers fluoride protection. Systemic fluorides can be obtained through community water fluoridation or dietary supplements in the form of tablets, drops or lozenges.

**Topical fluorides – Toothpaste and Mouth Rinses**

Children (over the age of two) and adults should use a fluoride toothpaste displaying the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Consult with your child’s dentist if you are considering the use of toothpaste before age two. Parents and caregivers should ensure that young children use an appropriately-sized toothbrush with a small brushing surface, and only a “pea-size” drop of toothpaste. Young children should always be supervised while brushing and taught to spit out rather than swallow toothpaste.

Fluoride mouth rinses have been shown to help prevent decay for both children and adults. These products are meant to be rinsed around in the mouth and spit out; they come in over-the-counter and prescription strength varieties. The ADA recommends the use of mouth rinses, but not for children under six years of age because they may swallow the rinse.

Professionally applied topical fluorides—in the form of gels, foams or rinses—are applied/supervised by a dentist. These fluorides are more concentrated than the self-applied fluorides, and therefore are not needed as frequently.

**Systemic Fluorides**

In areas with drinking water at or below 0.6 parts per million—such as Juneau beginning after January 15, 2007—dietary fluoride supplements (tablets, drops or lozenges) provide systemic fluoride. Prior to receiving supplements persons drinking well-water will need to have their water tested for its fluoride content. For optimum benefits, use of dietary supplements should begin when the child is six months and continued daily until the child is 16 years old.

For further information, please consult your dentist or health care provider.