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**Exploration of Dental Fluorosis Pathophysiology Diagnostic
Assessment Staging and Management Strategies**

Pavan Kumar Namdeo

Research Scholar, Department of Chemistry, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

Too much fluoride consumption throughout the tooth-forming phases causes dental fluorosis, a flaw in the enamel that develops over time. From mild brown discolouration and pitting to extensive structural enamel degradation, this ailment manifests itself clinically along a range. The main cause of fluorosis is the way fluoride affects ameloblast activity. This, in turn, causes problems with protein breakdown, increased porosity of the enamel, and altered crystal formation. For a more precise diagnosis, modern imaging techniques and quantitative light-induced fluorescence supplement traditional clinical indicators like the Thylstrup-Fejerskov Index and the Dean's Fluorosis Index. In order to differentiate between mild, moderate, and severe types of fluorosis, staging is crucial for treatment planning. If the lesion is small, conservative methods like enamel microabrasion and remineralization treatments may help, but if it's severe, the best course of action is to use resin infiltration, composite restorations, veneers, or crowns. Prevention efforts must continue to prioritize public health initiatives, such as water fluoride level monitoring and proper use guidelines for fluoride-containing products. Improved clinical results and community-level measures for lowering disease prevalence may be achieved by a complete knowledge of dental fluorosis causation, diagnosis, and therapy.

Keywords: *Dental Fluorosis, Enamel Hypomineralization, Fluoride Exposure, Resin Infiltration, Microabrasion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known enamel abnormalities linked to excessive and extended fluoride exposure during tooth formation is dental fluorosis. The necessary micronutrient fluorine has a small therapeutic window, which is both a blessing and a curse, as it builds enamel and decreases the occurrence of dental cavities. During the process of tooth mineralization, which usually begins at birth and continues until around the age of eight, structural changes take place within the enamel matrix, leading to hypomineralization and weakened enamel integrity. Dental fluorosis may cause a wide variety of symptoms, from white spots that are barely perceptible to brown spots, pitting, and even enamel loss in extreme cases. Areas with naturally high groundwater fluoride concentrations and those with unregulated use of fluoridated dental products and food sources are particularly at risk for dental fluorosis, which has recently become a global public health problem. The interactions between fluoride and ameloblasts throughout the enamel development cycle are the basis of the



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pathophysiology of dental fluorosis. Enamelin and amelogenin-processing enzyme protease activity is altered by excessive fluoride, which impairs protein elimination during enamel maturation. The subsurface enamel becomes more porous and organic matrix proteins are retained as a consequence of this interference. Despite its initially well-mineralized surface, fluoride weakens the enamel's structural integrity by interfering with crystal nucleation and growth. This causes the enamel to seem opaque, chalky, and porous.

Surface flaws and enamel fractures may result from mechanical stress and pressures exerted when chewing in more severe instances. As a result, creating reliable diagnostic criteria and efficient management techniques requires an understanding of these biological processes. Clinical examination, severity score, and, if necessary, supplementary imaging or laboratory tests are used to diagnose dental fluorosis. For grading fluorosis severity into normal, doubtful, very mild, mild, moderate, and severe, one of the most used tools is the Dean's Fluorosis Index. On the other hand, TF1–TF9 of the Thylstrup-Fejerskov (TF) Index provides a more comprehensive, histologically based staging system. By revealing subsurface demineralization that is not readily apparent in standard exams, cutting-edge diagnostic tools including digital photography, quantitative light-induced fluorescence (QLF), and laser fluorescence devices improve early identification. Estimating community fluorosis loads and guiding preventative actions are also aided by public health surveys that use epidemiological indices. Because there is a marked difference in treatment strategies for moderate and severe cases of dental fluorosis, its staging is vital. Managing mild fluorosis conservatively is typically seen as an aesthetic concern due to the condition's subtle white striations or speckles.

Treatment for moderate to severe fluorosis is more involved since it causes more noticeable dark stains, enamel pitting, and textural abnormalities. Amelogenesis imperfecta, caries-related decalcification, molar incisor hypomineralization (MIH), and fluorosis are additional enamel opacities that may be distinguished with the use of staging. Restoring aesthetics, reinforcing enamel, and boosting patient confidence are the goals of dental fluorosis management treatments. Classification of severity, patient age, and aesthetic goals all play a role in treatment options. In less severe instances, enamel opacities may be effectively concealed or removed using non-invasive methods including teeth whitening, remineralizing chemicals (such as fluoride varnishes, CPP-ACP creams, and bioactive glass), and enamel microabrasion. These therapies lessen the difference between afflicted and unaffected regions and increase the translucency of the enamel. Microabrasion, bleaching, and resin infiltration may be necessary for moderate fluorosis. In instance, resin infiltration has become well-known for penetrating hypomineralized enamel, decreasing porosity, and hiding discolouration via changes in refractive indices. When there is a lot of enamel loss or pitting, restorative treatments such full-coverage crowns, porcelain laminates, or composite veneers are usually necessary for severe fluorosis.

Along with restoring the tooth's aesthetics, these procedures shield the tooth's underlying structure from more harm. Reducing the prevalence of dental fluorosis at the community level is mostly achieved via preventative methods. Essential preventative efforts include monitoring fluoride levels



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in drinking water, raising knowledge about how children should use toothpaste, controlling fluoride emissions from industries, and supporting safe methods for feeding infants. Maintaining a balance between enhancing caries prevention and limiting fluorosis risk requires public health organizations to regularly analyze fluoride exposure from all available sources, including water, food, supplements, and dental goods. Extensive study is still needed to improve diagnostic tools and provide patient-centered treatment plans for fluorosis, which is a complex disease affected by environmental, dietary, and behavioral variables.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rosas López Portillo, Fernando et al., (2024) Dental fluorosis is a pathological condition that develops when enamel develops when people consume fluoride in excess of the authorized dosages or for extended periods of time. The effects of this exposure range from the appearance of fine white lines to significant structural abnormalities. As an epidemic disease with endemic features, the extent to which the affected areas alter is proportional to the amount of fluoride consumed. Lesions in TF1 and TF2 can be treated with infiltrating resin or teeth whitening, whereas lesions in TF3 and TF4 can be treated with micro abrasion and/or whitening. For TF5, a combination method involving macro, micro abrasion, and dental whitening is recommended. Prioritizing public health initiatives to reduce the risk of fluorosis consequences is crucial, particularly in endemic areas.

Adnan, Kashif et al., (2023) The purpose of this research is to examine the histological features of dental fluorosis at different severity levels and find any connections to the clinical symptoms that patients may experience. The study adds to our knowledge of this issue in dental health by investigating the correlation between fluoride concentration and the severity of fluorosis. The research strategy employed SPSS to examine quantitative data on dental fluorosis culled from credible sources such as PubMed and specialized journals. In accordance with PRISMA guidelines, we also sought out material from grey literature. After the data was cleaned up, descriptive statistics gave the first insights. The degree of dental fluorosis was correlated with histological changes using Pearson's correlation. Multiple regression approaches were then used to investigate these associations. To ensure the data was accurate, a meta-analytic approach was applied, and a one-way ANOVA was utilized to examine geographical variations in symptoms. The results highlight the robust relationship between high fluoride levels and advanced fluorosis. The study highlights the importance of effectively regulating and monitoring fluoride levels in water sources to prevent fluorosis. Community education on fluoride sources and improved diagnostic and treatment procedures by healthcare providers are necessary outcomes of these findings, which have ramifications for public health efforts and dental practices.

Boobalan, Sivashankari & Sidhu, Logesh (2023) when teeth are exposed to high levels of fluoride repeatedly while they are still developing, it can disrupt the development of dental enamel, leading to dental fluorosis. This condition is characterized by enamel that is less mineralized and more porous than normal. The hypo mineralized enamel subsurface appears white and opaque in dental fluorosis,



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which progresses to brown due to pitting and subsequent loss of enamel surface. Changes in tooth enamel thickness, pitting, areas of decalcification, mottling, and browning. There is no denying that fluorides have both positive and negative aspects. While fluorides play an important role in normal development, consuming too much of them can be detrimental and lead to serious abnormalities. Overexposure to fluoride can cause fluorosis, therefore it's important to know where fluoride comes from and how to avoid it. They undergo additional treatments that include bleaching, microabrasion, resin infiltration, and a combination of the two.

Srivastava, Rangoli et al., (2023) Dental fluorosis is a condition that alters the look and structure of teeth due to excessive fluoride consumption during tooth formation. Depending on how the teeth seem, dental fluorosis is usually categorized into several stages according to its severity. When dental fluorosis is mild, the enamel may continue to mineralize and the condition may improve on its own. Treatment may not be necessary. Whitening, dental bonding, veneers, and crowns are some of the treatment options available for more severe instances. Treatment can make teeth look better, but it won't fix the enamel surface damage that's already there. So, to stop more harm, watch how much fluoride you take in and make sure you brush and floss regularly. The best way to detect and treat dental fluorosis is to have regular exams and cleanings. Treatment for dental fluorosis can enhance the appearance of affected teeth; however, the condition is primarily cosmetic and has no bearing on any changes in the teeth's function. From the causes of dental fluorosis to the best ways to treat it, this article covers it all.

Abanto, Jenny et al., (2009) Tooth enamel with decreased mineral content and increased porosity is the result of multiple exposures to high quantities of fluoride throughout tooth formation, a condition known as dental fluorosis. Dental fluorosis can range from mild to severe, depending on factors such as the duration and timing of fluoride overexposure, the individual's reaction, weight, level of physical activity, diet, and bone growth. From twenty to thirty months of age, there is a chance that permanent teeth may undergo cosmetic alterations. To greatly aid in the prevention of dental cavities by acting in remineralization, the recommended daily intake of fluoride is 0.05 - 0.07 mg F/Kg/day. Dental fluorosis risk increases with daily intakes above this safe range. The current gold standard for fluorosis diagnosis calls for methods that can tell the difference between opaque lesions with symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns. Overexposure to fluoride can cause fluorosis, therefore it's important to know where fluoride comes from and how to handle it.

Aoba, T & Fejerskov, Ole (2002) The purpose of this review is to talk about the possible connection between ameloblastic activities, secreted proteases and enamel matrix proteins, developing crystals of enamel, and the composition of the fluid, which includes fluoride and calcium ions, and the pathophysiology of enamel fluorosis. When it comes to preventing dental cavities, fluoride is king. Mild to severe dental fluorosis has become more common in many communities over the past 20 years, especially in areas where controlled water fluoridation is in place. This is likely due to the increased exposure to fluoride in many forms and routes. There is no one threshold dose for the cumulative effects of fluoride on enamel development that cause dental fluorosis in humans; rather, it



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depends on the overall amount of fluoride consumed from all sources and the length of time exposed to fluoride. Because of their particular ability to facilitate the hydrolysis of acidic precursors like octacalcium phosphate and the precipitation of fluoridated apatite crystals, free fluoride ions are extremely sensitive to enamel mineralization.

III. DENTAL FLUOROSIS PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

Pathophysiological research into this frequent illness has led us to conclude that the interaction between fluoride and enamel, the tooth's outermost covering, is responsible for the development of this condition. This element is present in many foods and is also found naturally in water and soil. A recent study found that this element reduced the risk of cavities by strengthening the outer layer and making it very resistant to acid and other assaults in the mouth. Dental fluorosis may progress to a more severe form with excessive exposure.

Formation of enamel takes place throughout the phases of tooth development, with hydroxyapatite crystals produced on the outermost layer of this enamel. An elemental fluoride may cause an abruptness in crystal formation and, in turn, an aberrant structure to develop in the enamel if it gets in the way of this process. While the actual process is much more involved than what is detailed here, it is believed that this element interrupts enzymes that are responsible for preventing the production of these crystals and mineralization.

The severity of fluorosis that may develop in a tooth is proportional to the total quantity of fluoride consumed, the length of time that fluoride was consumed, and the time that has passed since the last dose. Symptoms of dental fluorosis, which may be very minor, include white patches or streaks that run down the tooth's surface. Dental fluorosis can be categorized into four levels, depending on its severity: moderate, severe, extremely mild, and a questionable level. Excessive discoloration and pitting can result from severe fluorosis. In severe cases, white flecks are almost invisible on the tooth's surface, but in moderate cases, white tiny lines or spots are visible on the tooth's outermost layer. On the surface of the tooth, there are also some dark spots. Extreme fluorosis, on the other hand, causes pitting and excessive discoloration on the enamel's surface. The interaction between fluoride and the enamel's outer layer and crystals causes changes to the enamel's natural structure, which in turn causes fluorosis. Noting the severity of dental fluorosis and taking additional steps to limit its occurrence are both important.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF DENTAL FLUOROSIS

The clinical evaluation of fluorosis entails a comprehensive assessment of the entire mouth and subsequent categorization of the condition's severity. The diagnosis of fluorosis is based on the morphology of the tooth's fluorosis, which can vary from barely perceptible white spots to extensive discoloration, pitting, and enamel loss.

Typically, the Thylstrup-Fejerskov index is used to categorize the severity of dental fluorosis. The index ranges from 0 (no fluorosis) to 9 (severe fluorosis). The damaged regions' size, color, and position on the teeth are all factors in the index. To determine the severity of dental fluorosis and to rule out other possible issues, a visual examination is sometimes combined with dental imaging tools



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like X-rays or dental radiography. It is worth mentioning that this ailment does not cause any discomfort and mostly manifests itself in morphological ways. However, when it comes time to provide patients with the necessary restorations and other treatments, we must take those steps in the event that dental fluorosis becomes more severe over time.

A clinical assessment of the teeth and a score system for the severity of the problem are used in the evaluation of dental fluorosis. To determine the full scope of the problem, dental imaging may also be used. Although most people with dental fluorosis may not experience any discomfort or symptoms, those with severe instances may need corrective dental work.

V. DENTAL FLUOROSIS STAGING

Too much of the naturally occurring element fluorine in the diet causes this disorder, which manifests itself mostly in tooth morphological changes. The teeth impacted by dental fluorosis are morphologically classified according to their visual appearance.

Figure 1 shows the progression of dental fluorosis through its many phases.



Figure 1: Different Types of Fluorosis

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://wowdental.in/dental-fluorosis/>)

- **Questionable fluorosis:** The initial stage is characterized by the appearance of very unusual white spots or streaks on the enamel and dentin of the teeth.
- **Very mild fluorosis:** At this point, the tooth surface is showing signs of opaqueness, mostly in the form of white spots, but they will not cover more than a quarter of the tooth.
- **Mild fluorosis:** More than half of the tooth's surface is covered with white spots, which indicate the presence of opaqueness.
- **Moderate fluorosis:** More than half of the tooth surface becomes opaque in the shape of white spots at this degree of severity, making it a progressive stage. At this point in time, we may also see dark stains.
- **Severe fluorosis:** At this point, dental fluorosis has progressed to its last stage. At this point, you should expect to observe pitting as well as those unsightly, stubborn brown stains.



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The most crucial thing to remember is that fluorosis causes significant morphological changes but no functional changes. In such a situation, it is critical to act swiftly, such as by contacting a dentist, in order to prevent the further decay or loss of the tooth if any signs are detected.

VI. TREATMENT STRATEGIES

Dental fluorosis treatment methods may be classified according to the degree of the problem and desired outcomes, such as enhancing appearance, repairing enamel, or supplying structural support. The following is a list of available treatments organized by these groups:

Cosmetic Treatments

Purpose: Reduce the appearance of discoloration and discoloration-related discoloration, particularly in moderate to mild instances of dental fluorosis.

Tooth Whitening (Bleaching): Teeth that are slightly discolored or fluorosed may be whitened at the dentist's office, at home, or with a mix of the two. Carbamide peroxide (5% concentration) and hydrogen peroxide (35% concentration) are the two most used bleaching agents. Bleaching gels with high concentrations, such 35% hydrogen peroxide, are used for in-office bleaching. Prior to immediately applying the gel, the teeth are isolated and cleansed. Curing lights that use halogens or light-emitting diode (LED) technology may boost the bleaching effect.



Figure 2: Before and After Teeth Whitening Treatment

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://wowdental.in/teeth-whitening-teeth-bleaching/>)

Microabrasion: To begin, the enamel was microabraded to eliminate any surface stains. Then, a resin infiltration was used to seal any holes and smooth out the color. Both the discoloration and the tooth's overall appearance were much improved by the combination therapy. Patients were quite pleased with the aesthetic outcomes.



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Figure 3: Enamel Microabrasion Treatment

(Source: Secondary data taken from <https://www.dentalhealthcenterofnorthernvirginia.com/microabrasion>)

Resin Infiltration: A process where resin is used to fill in white areas on porous enamel so they blend in with the rest of the tooth. The process entails penetrating the impacted enamel with a low-viscosity epoxy in order to conceal the yellow, brown, or white stains brought on by hypoplasia and fluorosis. This evens out discolouration without removing a lot of enamel, creating a "blending" look. The resin does a great job of leveling off the appearance of stained and non-stained regions, making them seem more similar and so improving the aesthetic. When it comes to mild to moderate stains, resin infiltration is a more conservative alternative than typical restorative procedures like veneers or crowns. This is because it is less intrusive.



Figure 4: Resin Infiltration

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://pocketdentistry.com/resin-infiltration-after-enamel-etching/>)



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Structural Restoration Treatments

Purpose: For moderate to severe instances, strengthen the enamel, smooth down rough areas, and fortify the tooth structure.

Composite Bonding: Cleaning and etching the enamel surface is the first step in treating mild fluorosis. The next step is to apply a bonding agent to make sure the composite material sticks firmly. Dent in shade composite and enamel shade are the first two layers of resin applied to the teeth. To ensure perfect bonding and aesthetics, the material is light-cured after each layer. Composite bonding is a great way to fix discoloration and make teeth with fluorosis seem better. A seamless appearance may be achieved with this procedure since it can be customized to blend in with the surrounding teeth's natural color. The fact that composite bonding for fluorosis is very non-invasive is a major plus. Composite bonding doesn't need removing much enamel, unlike veneers or crowns that do. Additionally, it is a faster and less expensive option.



Figure 5: Composite Bonding

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://www.whitesdental.co.uk/composite-bonding-before-after/>)

Porcelain Veneers: When serious staining or structural damage to the teeth occurs as a result of dental fluorosis, porcelain veneers are often prescribed as an effective therapeutic option. In order to enhance the look and functionality of the teeth, these thin, custom-made porcelain shells are bonded to the front surface. A thorough evaluation of the patient's teeth is usually the first step in placing porcelain veneers. To make sure the veneers stick well, the enamel may require a little prepping if fluorosis has produced serious discoloration or damage. When applying veneers, it may be necessary to remove only a little amount of enamel from the teeth. Nevertheless, the combination of porcelain and enamel creates a sturdy and long-lasting surface, which improves the appearance and functionality of the teeth. Porcelain veneers are an excellent choice for patients with severe fluorosis discoloration because they may hide the discoloration and restore the tooth's original color. Porcelain is perfect for cosmetic procedures because of its translucence, which allows it to closely



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resemble the look of genuine teeth. When opposed to more superficial treatments, like bleaching or microabrasion, which may only provide short-term benefits, porcelain veneers offer a permanent answer. Patients with fluorosis who are worried about the treatment's longevity and upkeep may find peace in the fact that porcelain veneers are stain-resistant.



Figure 6: Porcelain Veneers

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://www.thedentalroom.com.au/veneers-before-and-after/>)

Dental Crowns: When enamel is severely destroyed, as it often is in severe instances of dental fluorosis, dental crowns may be an effective therapy. To improve the look and function of damaged teeth, crowns are a common treatment option. If the enamel is too thin or too damaged to sustain veneers or fillings due to severe fluorosis, a crown may be the best choice for comprehensive repair. Crowns encase the whole tooth, reinforcing and protecting teeth that have suffered structural damage. Teeth with severe discoloration, pitting, or surface deterioration of the enamel are ideal candidates for this therapy. In situations of severe fluorosis, sensitivity is prevalent; nevertheless, crowns may alleviate this problem by acting as a protective barrier. Crown operations, on the other hand, need the removal of portion of the tooth structure, which may make them more invasive than other treatments. Hence, dentists must assess the tooth's state to see whether this approach is suitable.



Figure 7: Dental Crowns

(Source: Secondary source taken from <https://www.maxidentclinic.co.uk/dental-crown-in-catford/>)



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Minimally Invasive Enamel Preservation Treatments

Several approaches may be used for minimally invasive treatments of dental fluorosis that seek to preserve enamel and reduce sensitivity:

Topical Remineralization: It is usual practice to fortify poor enamel using fluoride varnishes and calcium phosphate preparations. In order to restore the look of demineralized enamel, these treatments may remineralize damaged regions. As a protective coating and to increase enamel strength, varnishes such as Clinpro XT and Duraphat (5% NaF) are often used in clinical settings.

Glass Ionomer Cement (GIC): Filling fluorosis-related rough or pitted enamel with GIC is a successful remedy. It does double duty as cavity filler and a tooth strengthener since it gradually releases fluoride. With this substance, the tooth may have its function and appearance restored with little to no damage.

Preventive and Supportive Care

Purpose: Preserve the condition of the enamel, stop its future degradation, and help repaired teeth last as long as possible.

Dietary Guidance: It is critical to limit sugary snacks that hasten decay and acidic drinks that destroy enamel. In order to protect teeth against enamel erosion, it is recommended to have a diet high in calcium and vitamin D.

Fluoride Management: When kids consume an excessive amount of fluoride during the time when their permanent teeth are growing in (usually until about the age of 8), it may lead to fluorosis. Water and toothpaste containing fluoride should be considered carefully by parents. To reduce the risk of unintentional swallowing, use a little "smear" of toothpaste on children less than three and a "pea-sized" quantity on children older than three. Fluoride isn't just in toothpaste; it's also in mouthwash and some foods made with water that has been treated. For youngsters less than 6, it is recommended to use them cautiously.

Regular Dental Checkups: In order to control dental fluorosis, it is vital to have regular dental checkups. This will allow for early identification and prompt action. Dentists can track the development of fluorosis, from its earliest, more mild symptoms (like white spots) to its later, more severe symptoms (like enamel degradation), via these checkups. In order to keep the patient's fluoride intake within acceptable limits, early detection allows the dentist to suggest individualized ways for managing fluoride. To avoid more enamel damage in youngsters, this may include modifying their fluoride supplements or suggesting fluoride-free goods. Also, by going in for checkups often, you may have your teeth treated for any potential issues, such weak enamel, by using remineralizing agents or fluoride varnishes.

VII. CONCLUSION

Excessive fluoride exposure during enamel formation causes dental fluorosis, a complicated disorder that affects both the health of the teeth and their appearance. In addition to preventing cavities, fluoride may interfere with enamel mineralization if taken in excess, as shown by the pathophysiological causes. Standardized indices like the TF Index and Dean's Index provide accurate staging and accurate diagnosis,



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which in turn constitute the basis for individualized clinical therapy. Conservative therapies, including as micro-abrasion and tooth whitening, are usually effective for mild instances of fluorosis, but sophisticated restorative procedures, such as composite or porcelain veneers, may be necessary for severe cases. Prevention efforts that target community awareness, controlled fluoride exposure, and environmental fluoride source monitoring are just as important as therapeutic therapies when it comes to lowering disease prevalence. In the end, public health workers and doctors can better manage current instances of dental fluorosis and prevent new cases from occurring if they have a firm grasp of the disease's biology, diagnostics, and treatment options.

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