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Review paper

Influence of Sodium Fluoride on Nitrate Reductase Inhibition and Physiological Changes in Plants

T. Shankar [a] *

[a] *Principal, HoD & Associate Professor of Botany, Govt. Degree College, Siricilla -505301, India*

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***Corresponding author**
T. Shankar
✉ **Email**
dhartudr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Sodium fluoride (NaF) poses significant phytotoxic effects on plants, primarily through the inhibition of key metabolic processes. Fluoride is readily absorbed by plant leaves and roots, accumulating in metabolically active cells, particularly at leaf tips and margins. This accumulation leads to a spectrum of symptoms depending on species sensitivity and environmental factors. Fluoride concentrations vary across species, with resistant plants such as cotton and asparagus tolerating higher levels without visible injury, while sensitive species like Chenopodium murale exhibit severe toxicity even at low concentrations.

Fluoride exposure induces structural and functional changes in plant cells, resulting in chlorosis, necrosis, and ultimately reduced photosynthesis, growth, and yield. Severe fluoride toxicity can lead to plant death, with affected leaves containing significantly higher fluoride levels than healthy ones. Sodium fluoride inhibits nitrate reductase (NR) activity in vivo, a critical enzyme for nitrogen metabolism, while not affecting its activity in vitro. Additionally, fluoride disrupts various physiological processes, leading to stunted growth, diminished photosynthetic pigments, and impaired antioxidative enzyme activity. It also interferes with cell signalling and calcium dynamics, crucial for fertilization and overall plant development. The cumulative impact of sodium fluoride on seed germination and seedling growth underscores the need for further investigation into its ecological consequences and management strategies to mitigate its effects on agricultural productivity and plant health.

1. Introduction to Sodium Fluoride (NaF) and Phytotoxicity

Sodium Fluoride (NaF) is an inorganic compound consisting of sodium (Na) and fluoride (F) ions. It appears as a colorless, crystalline solid and is soluble in water. NaF is widely utilized in various fields, including dental care for preventing dental caries, in the manufacturing of glass and aluminum, and as a pesticide in agriculture (Higgins et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2022). Sources of Sodium Fluoride include:

1. **Industrial Emissions:** Industries such as aluminum production and glass manufacturing release fluoride compounds into the environment, contributing to contamination in soil and water (Zhang et al., 2017).
2. **Coal-Fired Power Plants:** Coal combustion is a significant source of fluoride emissions, which can settle on agricultural lands and affect crop health (Li et al., 2018).
3. **Fertilizers:** The production of phosphate fertilizers, particularly superphosphates, can lead to increased fluoride levels in the soil, as phosphate rock often contains fluoride (Huang et al., 2016).
4. **Pesticides:** Sodium fluoride is used as an insecticide and rodenticide, introducing fluoride

into agricultural ecosystems (European Food Safety Authority, 2008).
5. **Natural Sources:** Fluoride occurs naturally in the environment due to the weathering of fluoride-containing minerals, contributing to baseline levels in soil and water (Singh et al., 2019).

2. Concept of Phytotoxicity and Its Relevance to Plant Health

Phytotoxicity is defined as the detrimental effects of chemical substances on plant health, leading to damage in growth, development, and physiological processes. The phenomenon encompasses a wide array of symptoms and impacts that can manifest during various growth stages, from germination to maturity (García et al., 2014). The relevance of phytotoxicity to plant health includes several critical aspects:

1. **Growth Inhibition:** Exposure to phytotoxic substances can hinder plant growth by disrupting cell division, elongation, and overall metabolic activities, resulting in reduced biomass and yield (Sabal et al., 2006; Divan et al., 2008).
2. **Physiological Symptoms:** Plants under phytotoxic stress may exhibit symptoms such as chlorosis (yellowing of leaves), necrosis (death of plant tissue), leaf burn, and wilting, indicating stress and compromised health (Bhargava & Bhardwaj, 2010).
3. **Altered Metabolism:** Phytotoxic agents can impair critical physiological processes, including photosynthesis, respiration, and nutrient uptake. For instance, sodium fluoride has been shown to inhibit enzymes involved in these metabolic pathways, leading to diminished plant performance (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010).
4. **Ecological Impact:** Phytotoxicity affects not only individual plants but also the entire ecosystem. Changes in plant health can disrupt herbivore populations that rely on these plants for sustenance and can alter competitive dynamics among species (García et al., 2014).
5. **Agricultural Implications:** Understanding phytotoxicity is essential for sustainable agricultural practices. Identifying the sources and effects of toxic substances, such as sodium fluoride, allows for the formulation of management strategies to minimize exposure and safeguard plant health, thus ensuring food security and environmental sustainability (Datta et al., 2012).

While fluoride (F) is a naturally occurring, element distributed widely in the Earth's environment present in soil, water, and the atmosphere—elevated levels are associated with significant health issues and adverse effects on plant health and productivity (Gadi et al., 2012; Sant'Anna-Santos et al., 2013; Das et al., 2015). The main contributors to fluoride contamination in agricultural systems include industrial emissions, coal-fired power plants, and the use of phosphate fertilizers, particularly superphosphates, which are known to contain elevated fluoride levels.

Despite its presence in the environment, fluoride is not classified as an essential nutrient for plants (Jha et al., 2013). Even at relatively low concentrations, fluoride can cause considerable physiological and biochemical alterations in plants without necessarily producing visible injury signs. Research has demonstrated that excessive fluoride can inhibit seed germination, lead to structural deformities at the cellular level, decrease photosynthetic efficiency, alter membrane permeability, and lower overall productivity and biomass in plants (Sabal et al., 2006; Divan et al., 2008; Bhargava & Bhardwaj, 2010; Datta et al., 2012).

Fluoride impacts various physiological processes in plants, resulting in observable symptoms like stunted growth, chlorosis, leaf tip burn, and necrosis. The uptake of fluoride occurs through plant roots, with the substance being transported via xylem to transpiring organs, primarily the leaves, where it can accumulate and exert negative effects (Gupta et al., 2009). Given the sensitivity of many plant species to fluoride toxicity (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010), understanding the impact of fluoride on plants is essential for identifying species that can tolerate challenging environmental conditions.

This study aims to investigate the effects of 10 mM sodium fluoride (NaF) on the inhibition of nitrate reductase (NR) activity and the associated physiological changes in various crop species. The outcomes will enhance our understanding of plant sensitivity to fluoride ions and aid in the selection of tolerant species that can thrive in contaminated environments.

3. Mechanisms of Fluoride Absorption in Plants

3.1 Absorption of Fluoride in Plants

Fluoride is primarily absorbed by plants through their roots, although leaves and other plant structures can also take up fluoride from the environment. The mechanisms of fluoride absorption involve several pathways and physiological processes that facilitate its entry into plant tissues.

3.1.1 Root Uptake

The primary mode of fluoride entry into plants occurs through the roots, where fluoride ions (F^-) are taken up from the soil solution. The absorption is largely passive, occurring through ion channels and transporters in the root cell membranes (Huang et al., 2016). Fluoride ions compete with other anions, particularly hydroxide (OH^-) and phosphate (PO_4^{3-}), for uptake through root membranes. This competition can influence the efficiency of fluoride absorption (Miller et al., 2009).

3.1.1.1 Stomatal Uptake

Leaves can absorb fluoride directly from the atmosphere, particularly in regions with high airborne fluoride levels. Stomata, which are small openings on the leaf surface, facilitate the gaseous exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen but can also allow the entry of fluoride vapors (Inoue et al., 2013). Once inside the leaf, fluoride can affect chloroplast function and photosynthetic processes.

3.1.1.2 Lenticels

Lenticels, which are small openings on the stems and fruits, can also absorb fluoride from the surrounding environment. This pathway is less significant compared to root and stomatal uptake but can contribute to the overall fluoride load in plants, especially in woody species (Sahu et al., 2020).

3.1.1.3 Leaves

Fluoride can be deposited on leaf surfaces through atmospheric deposition and can subsequently be absorbed via cuticular and epidermal layers. The leaf's surface can also accumulate fluoride from dew or rainfall that has dissolved airborne fluoride (Duncan et al., 2011).

3.2 Pathways of Fluoride Uptake and Transport

Once absorbed, fluoride ions are transported within the plant through the xylem and phloem, with a particular tendency to accumulate in specific tissues, especially leaf tips and margins.

3.2.1 Xylem Transport

After uptake by the roots, fluoride is transported upwards through the xylem sap to aerial parts of the plant. The movement is facilitated by transpiration pull, which generates a negative pressure that drives water and dissolved nutrients, including fluoride, upward (Tóth et al., 2015). The concentration of fluoride can be higher in the upper parts of the plant, particularly in the leaf tips and margins, where transpiration rates are highest, leading to localized accumulation (Gupta et al., 2009).

3.2.2 Phloem Transport

Although primarily absorbed through the roots and transported via the xylem, fluoride can also move through the phloem, particularly during the remobilization of nutrients in plants (Huang et al., 2016). This movement can occur during stress conditions when the plant reallocates resources.

3.2.3 Accumulation in Leaf Tips and Margins

The accumulation of fluoride at leaf tips and margins is due to the high transpiration rates and metabolic activity in these regions. Fluoride tends to accumulate where water loss is greater, leading to potential toxicity symptoms such as chlorosis and necrosis, especially in sensitive species (Divan et al., 2008). High fluoride concentrations at leaf margins can disrupt physiological processes, leading to reduced photosynthetic efficiency and other adverse effects (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010) (Fig. 1).

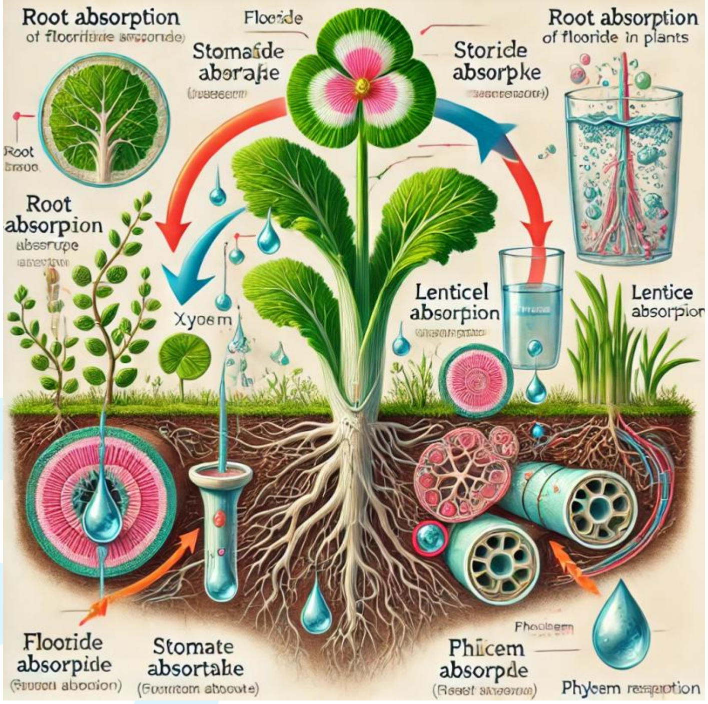

Fig. 1 Infographic illustrating the mechanisms of fluoride absorption in plants

4. Variability in Plant Sensitivity to Fluoride

Plants show considerable variability in their sensitivity to fluoride (F), with differences often influenced by species, environmental factors, and genetic makeup. This sensitivity affects their physiological and biochemical responses to fluoride, leading to diverse outcomes in growth, productivity, and overall health.

5. Differences in Fluoride Tolerance Among Plant Species

Fluoride tolerance varies widely across plant species, with some plants showing resilience to fluoride exposure, while others exhibit detrimental physiological effects even at low concentrations. For instance, certain plants such as *Chenopodium murale* (nettle-leaved goosefoot) and *Gladiolus* species are highly sensitive to fluoride. These plants display visible symptoms of fluoride toxicity, including chlorosis, necrosis, and stunted growth, at lower concentrations of fluoride exposure (Sant'Anna-Santos et al., 2013; Bhargava & Bhardwaj, 2010). In contrast, other species like cotton (*Gossypium spp.*) and asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) demonstrate greater resistance to fluoride stress, maintaining growth and productivity despite elevated levels of fluoride in their environment (Higgins et al., 2014).

6. Sensitive versus Resistant Plant Examples

Sensitive Plants: *Chenopodium murale* (nettle-leaved goosefoot) shows significant physiological distress in the presence of fluoride, as seen in leaf chlorosis and tip necrosis (Das et al., 2015). *Gladiolus* species experience inhibited growth, pigment synthesis impairment, and other stress symptoms when exposed to even moderate fluoride levels (Sant'Anna-Santos et al., 2013).

Resistant Plants: *Cotton (Gossypium spp.)* exhibits high fluoride tolerance, which makes it a potential crop for areas with elevated soil fluoride levels (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010). *Asparagus (Asparagus officinalis)* demonstrates resilience by managing fluoride accumulation without substantial physiological damage (Yang et al., 2022).

7. Environmental Factors Influencing Plant Response to Fluoride

Plant responses to fluoride are also shaped by various environmental factors, including soil pH, humidity, and temperature:

Soil pH: Acidic soils (low pH) tend to increase fluoride availability, as fluoride ions become more soluble and readily taken up by plant roots. In such conditions, even resistant plants may accumulate fluoride to toxic levels (Zhang et al., 2017).

Humidity: Higher humidity can enhance fluoride uptake through foliar pathways, as stomata are more likely to remain open under such conditions, allowing fluoride entry and accumulation in leaf tissues (Li et al., 2018).

Temperature: Warmer temperatures tend to increase plant transpiration rates, potentially accelerating fluoride transport to sensitive areas like leaf tips and margins, where accumulation can lead to visible symptoms of toxicity (Gupta et al., 2009). Understanding the variability in plant sensitivity to fluoride is crucial for developing agricultural practices that mitigate fluoride's impact on sensitive species while utilizing fluoride-resistant species for cultivation in contaminated areas. This approach promotes sustainable agriculture, especially in regions affected by fluoride pollution.

8. Physiological Effects of Fluoride on Plants

Fluoride (F) exposure leads to significant structural and functional changes within plant cells, affecting key physiological processes and often resulting in observable symptoms that impede plant growth and productivity.

8.1 Structural and Functional Changes in Plant Cells Due to Fluoride

When absorbed, fluoride primarily accumulates in leaf tissues and disrupts cellular structure. In chloroplasts, for example, fluoride exposure can cause atypical structural alterations, including swelling and disorganization of thylakoid membranes, which are critical for photosynthesis. Additionally, fluoride disrupts the stability of cell membranes by altering ion permeability and inhibiting enzymes involved in membrane integrity, which impairs the overall function of cellular compartments (Gupta et al., 2009; Sant'Anna-Santos et al., 2013).

Fluoride ions interfere with nutrient absorption and enzyme activity within cells. For instance, fluoride inhibits several enzymes necessary for metabolism, such as those involved in glycolysis and the pentose phosphate pathway. This inhibition leads to reduced energy production and diminished synthesis of essential compounds, impairing basic metabolic processes required for growth and development (Das et al., 2015; Higgins et al., 2014). Moreover, fluoride can affect mitochondrial respiration by inhibiting oxidative phosphorylation, further decreasing energy availability within plant cells (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010).

8.2 Symptoms of Fluoride Toxicity and Implications

The most common symptoms of fluoride toxicity in plants include chlorosis (leaf yellowing), necrosis (death of tissue, particularly at leaf margins and tips), and stunted growth. Chlorosis results from fluoride-induced impairment of chlorophyll synthesis, reducing the plant's photosynthetic capability and affecting carbohydrate production necessary for growth (Bhargava & Bhardwaj, 2010; Gadi et al., 2012).

Necrosis, particularly at the leaf tips and margins, occurs as fluoride accumulates in these regions due to transpiration pull. This symptom is often accompanied by leaf scorching and brownish lesions, which are visible indicators of cell death (Gadi et al., 2012; Das et al., 2015). Stunted growth arises from the cumulative effects of reduced photosynthesis, disrupted nutrient uptake, and inhibited enzymatic activity, ultimately leading to decreased biomass and yield (Sabal et al., 2006).

Fluoride toxicity can also have cascading effects on photosynthesis and plant productivity. By affecting chloroplast integrity, electron transport is inhibited, and the rate of photosynthesis declines, which limits energy and carbohydrate supply for other physiological processes. Consequently, the reduced energy impedes processes such as protein and lipid synthesis, vital for cell growth and repair, leading to lower yields and poor plant health (Jha et al., 2013; Sant'Anna-Santos et al., 2013).

8.3 Implications for Agriculture

Fluoride toxicity has far-reaching implications for agricultural productivity. Plants exposed to high fluoride levels may show severe yield losses due to inhibited growth, compromised photosynthetic ability, and reduced fruit and seed production. Understanding these physiological effects and identifying fluoride-tolerant plant species or varieties are crucial for managing crops in fluoride-contaminated regions and sustaining agricultural productivity in affected areas (Li et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2022).

8.4 Impact on Key Metabolic Processes

Fluoride (F) acts as a potent metabolic inhibitor in plants, disrupting essential processes such as photosynthesis, respiration, and nitrogen metabolism. These disruptions can severely impact plant growth and productivity.

8.5 Fluoride as a Metabolic Inhibitor

Photosynthesis: Fluoride disrupts photosynthesis by inhibiting chlorophyll synthesis and altering the structure of chloroplasts. Chloroplasts often show swelling and disorganized thylakoid membranes upon fluoride exposure, which disrupts the electron transport chain and leads to reduced energy production (Gupta et al., 2009). Fluoride can also inhibit enzymes involved in carbon fixation, such as ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase (Rubisco), further decreasing photosynthetic efficiency (Bhargava & Bhardwaj, 2010). These disruptions reduce the plant's overall capacity for carbohydrate synthesis, limiting energy for growth and other metabolic processes.

Respiration: Fluoride interferes with mitochondrial function by inhibiting oxidative phosphorylation, a key process in cellular respiration. This inhibition occurs due to fluoride's binding with magnesium ions, which are essential cofactors for various mitochondrial enzymes. Reduced ATP production limits the energy available for various cellular activities, impacting growth and development. Additionally, fluoride's impact on glycolysis and the pentose phosphate pathway impedes the production of energy and carbon skeletons necessary for the synthesis of amino acids, proteins, and other macromolecules (Gautam & Bhardwaj, 2010).

Nitrogen Metabolism: Nitrogen metabolism is crucial for synthesizing amino acids, proteins, and nucleic acids. Fluoride exposure impacts nitrogen metabolism primarily by inhibiting nitrate reductase (NR), a key enzyme responsible for the reduction of nitrate (NO_3^-) to nitrite (NO_2^-). Nitrate reductase requires a magnesium ion (Mg^{2+}) as a cofactor; fluoride competes with Mg^{2+}, reducing NR activity and nitrate reduction. This inhibition disrupts nitrogen flow within the plant, leading to lower amino acid and protein levels, which are essential for cellular growth and repair (Jha et al., 2013; Das et al., 2015). With decreased NR activity, plants struggle to convert absorbed nitrate into usable forms, which impedes amino acid synthesis. This effect can manifest in nitrogen deficiency symptoms, including stunted growth, chlorosis, and reduced leaf expansion (Higgins et al., 2014). As nitrogen is fundamental to DNA, RNA, and protein synthesis, any disruption in nitrogen metabolism has wide-ranging implications for cell division, growth, and metabolic function.

8.6 Implications for Plant Growth and Productivity

Fluoride's effects on photosynthesis, respiration, and nitrogen metabolism are interconnected. When photosynthesis is compromised, carbohydrate availability declines, which limits energy for other metabolic processes, including nitrogen assimilation. Reduced respiration further lowers available ATP, adding stress to energy-dependent pathways such as nitrogen reduction and protein synthesis. As a result, plants exhibit symptoms of fluoride toxicity chlorosis, necrosis, and growth inhibition that ultimately reduce yield and compromise overall plant health (Li et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2022). Understanding these metabolic disruptions is essential for managing fluoride exposure in agricultural systems. Selecting fluoride-tolerant species and implementing practices that mitigate fluoride uptake may reduce its negative effects on crops.

8.7 Effects on Photosynthetic Pigments and Antioxidative Enzymes

Fluoride exposure can significantly disrupt the physiological and biochemical stability of plants, primarily by altering photosynthetic pigments and impairing antioxidative enzyme activity. These disruptions compromise the plant's ability to produce energy efficiently and defend itself against oxidative damage, resulting in diminished growth and productivity.

8.7.1 Effects on Photosynthetic Pigments

Chlorophyll Degradation: Fluoride exposure commonly leads to a reduction in chlorophyll content, specifically chlorophyll a and b, which are essential for capturing light energy during photosynthesis. Fluoride disrupts the biosynthesis pathway of chlorophyll by interfering with enzymes like δ-aminolevulinic acid dehydratase and protochlorophyllide reductase. This interference hinders the formation of chlorophyll precursors, causing a visible yellowing of leaves, or chlorosis, especially in older leaves (Reddy & Aery, 2013;

Srivastava et al., 2015). Chlorosis indicates a decrease in the plant's photosynthetic efficiency, often translating to reduced growth and vitality.

Carotenoid Depletion: Carotenoids, which serve as accessory pigments and protectors against photo-oxidative damage, are also negatively affected by fluoride. With lowered carotenoid levels, plants become more vulnerable to light-induced oxidative damage, as carotenoids play a key role in quenching reactive oxygen species (ROS) and dissipating excess light energy (Dey & Dwivedi, 2014). This carotenoid depletion further reduces the plant's capacity to handle environmental stress, compounding the detrimental effects of fluoride.

8.7.2 Impact on Antioxidative Enzyme Activity

Induction of Oxidative Stress: Fluoride exposure is associated with an increase in reactive oxygen species (ROS), which are toxic byproducts of cellular metabolism. In plants, ROS can damage cellular structures, including lipids, proteins, and nucleic acids. To manage ROS, plants rely on a suite of antioxidative enzymes, such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and peroxidase (POD), to neutralize these reactive species (Sharma et al., 2017).

Superoxide Dismutase (SOD) Response: Superoxide dismutase (SOD) is one of the first enzymes that respond to oxidative stress by converting superoxide radicals into hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), a less reactive form of ROS. Studies indicate that under fluoride stress, SOD activity initially increases as an adaptive response, helping to mitigate oxidative stress by breaking down harmful radicals. However, prolonged or high fluoride concentrations overwhelm this defense mechanism, leading to reduced SOD activity and a buildup of ROS. This leads to oxidative stress, accelerating cellular damage and affecting plant health (Kumar et al., 2014; Patra et al., 2018).

Inhibition of Other Antioxidative Enzymes: Alongside SOD, other antioxidative enzymes such as catalase (CAT) and peroxidase (POD) also experience changes in activity. These enzymes, which are essential for breaking down hydrogen peroxide into water and oxygen, may show increased activity at initial fluoride exposure but are often inhibited at higher fluoride concentrations. This reduction in overall antioxidative capacity results in a buildup of ROS, further compromising cellular health and function (Rout et al., 2016).

8.8 Implications for Plant Growth and Productivity

The dual impact of fluoride on photosynthetic pigments and antioxidative enzymes severely impairs plant growth and productivity. Reduced chlorophyll and carotenoid levels diminish the plant's photosynthetic efficiency, leading to less energy for growth and development. Meanwhile, weakened antioxidative defenses exacerbate oxidative stress, damaging cellular structures and accelerating symptoms such as necrosis, stunted growth, and reduced yield. Sensitive species, like Chenopodium murale and Gladiolus, are especially prone to these adverse effects, while fluoride-resistant species tend to maintain some level of antioxidative resilience (Patra et al., 2018). Effective management of fluoride exposure in sensitive plants is thus essential for sustainable crop productivity in fluoride-affected areas.

8.8.1 Interference with Cell Signalling and Nutrient Dynamics

Fluoride disrupts cellular signalling and nutrient dynamics in plants, affecting critical processes for growth, development, and stress response. Fluoride ions interact with essential cations and disrupt calcium-dependent signalling pathways, impacting plant health and productivity, especially in processes such as fertilization and nutrient uptake.

8.8.2 Disruption of Cellular Signalling

Calcium Signaling Pathways: Calcium ions (Ca^{2+}) play a fundamental role in cellular signalling pathways in plants, particularly in response to environmental stressors. Calcium signalling is involved in numerous physiological processes, such as stomatal regulation, pollen tube growth, and root development. When plants experience environmental stress, calcium acts as a secondary messenger that helps relay signals, allowing the plant to respond adaptively. Fluoride interferes with calcium signaling by competing with Ca^{2+} ions and disrupting their availability within cells (Dey & Dwivedi, 2014). This leads to impaired signalling responses, affecting processes like stomatal opening, which is crucial for gas exchange and water balance (Sharma et al., 2017).

Interference with Phosphorylation and Enzyme Activity: Many enzymes that are essential to plant metabolism, including kinases, rely on phosphorylation processes that involve calcium. Fluoride disrupts this phosphorylation by directly interacting with magnesium and calcium ions, which serve as cofactors for these enzymes. As a result, enzymes that play a role in cellular signalling and metabolism, such as ATPases, are inhibited. This reduces the efficiency of energy transfer and affects the plant's response to environmental stimuli, limiting its ability to adapt to changing conditions (Rout et al., 2016).

8.9 Impact on Nutrient Dynamics and Calcium Availability

Calcium-Mediated Fertilization and Growth: Calcium is critical in fertilization, particularly in pollen tube growth and fertilization events. When fluoride accumulates, it can interfere with calcium uptake and its movement through the plant, causing poor pollen tube elongation, reduced fertilization, and seed development issues. Studies have shown that fluoride exposure leads to **inhibited pollen germination**, reduced pollen tube growth, and, consequently, lower fruit and seed yields in sensitive plants (Patra et al., 2018). This effect on calcium dynamics disrupts reproduction, affecting plant populations and yields, especially in crops sensitive to fluoride.

Magnesium and Potassium Disruption: Besides calcium, fluoride also interferes with magnesium (Mg^{2+}) and potassium (K^{+}) ions, both of which are essential for chlorophyll production and enzymatic functions. Magnesium is a central atom in chlorophyll molecules and plays a vital role in ATP synthesis, while potassium is important for osmotic regulation and enzyme activation. Fluoride's interference with these nutrients compromises photosynthesis and growth, leading to symptoms such as chlorosis and necrosis (Dey & Dwivedi, 2014). Reduced availability of magnesium and potassium further aggravates nutrient imbalances, limiting the plant's ability to photosynthesize effectively and maintain cellular function under fluoride stress (Srivastava et al., 2015).

8.10 Implications for Plant Development and Health

The disruptions in calcium and other nutrient dynamics caused by fluoride exposure significantly affect plant development. Calcium deficiency and impaired cellular signaling result in poor root and shoot development, limited reproductive success, and an overall decrease in plant resilience. Sensitive species, particularly those that rely heavily on calcium-mediated processes, exhibit stunted growth, necrosis, and lower yields. These effects highlight the importance of managing fluoride exposure in agricultural areas to sustain healthy crop production and minimize nutrient imbalances.

8.11 Impact on Seed Germination and Seedling Growth

Fluoride exposure significantly affects both seed germination rates and early seedling development in plants, often leading to reduced plant vigor and productivity. Fluoride toxicity can impede water uptake, disrupt enzymatic activity, and alter cell structure, all of which are essential processes during seed germination and seedling growth.

8.11.1 Effects on Seed Germination Rates

Water Absorption and Seed Imbibition: During the initial stages of germination, seeds absorb water through a process called imbibition, which triggers metabolic processes necessary for germination. Fluoride ions can disrupt water uptake by interfering with cell membrane permeability. This interference reduces the imbibition rate, limiting the rehydration of seed tissues and ultimately slowing down or even preventing the initiation of germination (Sharma et al., 2017). Research has shown that seeds exposed to high fluoride concentrations have lower germination rates than those in fluoride-free environments, particularly for sensitive species like *Pisum sativum* (pea) and *Triticum aestivum* (wheat) (Chauhan & Agarwal, 2015).

Enzyme Inhibition: Fluoride exposure also inhibits key enzymes involved in the germination process. Enzymes such as α-amylase, which break down starch into sugars for energy, are essential for seedling growth. Fluoride ions inhibit α-amylase activity, reducing the energy supply necessary for cellular growth and division. As a result, seeds exposed to fluoride often exhibit delayed or incomplete germination (Patra *et al.,* 2018).

8.11.2 Effects on Seedling Growth and Development

Root and Shoot Growth: Fluoride toxicity has a pronounced impact on root and shoot elongation. Studies show that fluoride exposure stunts root and shoot growth due to disrupted cell division and elongation processes in meristematic tissues. Fluoride interferes with calcium and magnesium availability, both of which are crucial for cell wall stability and function. This stunted growth limits the plant's ability to absorb water and nutrients, resulting in weaker and smaller seedlings (Kumari & Singh, 2019).

Oxidative Stress and Cellular Damage: High fluoride levels induce oxidative stress in seedlings by generating reactive oxygen species (ROS). This oxidative stress damages cellular structures such as the plasma membrane and chloroplasts. In response, antioxidant enzymes like catalase and superoxide dismutase (SOD) increase activity to mitigate ROS damage. However, prolonged fluoride exposure overwhelms these defenses, leading to chlorosis (yellowing) and necrosis (cell death) in young leaves, reducing overall seedling vigor (Jha & Dubey, 2015).

Reduced Photosynthetic Efficiency: Seedlings exposed to fluoride exhibit reduced chlorophyll content, impairing photosynthesis. This reduction in chlorophyll limits energy production for growth, impacting both root and shoot development. Fluoride-sensitive crops, such as *Phaseolus vulgaris* (common bean), demonstrate reduced leaf area, compromised photosynthetic efficiency, and a lower survival rate in high-fluoride environments (Sharma et al., 2017).

8.12 Implications for Crop Yield and Plant Health

Fluoride's negative effects on seed germination and seedling growth can lead to poor plant establishment, lower crop yields, and reduced resilience to environmental stresses. This impact is particularly severe in fluoride-sensitive species grown in high-fluoride soils or areas exposed to fluoride contamination from industrial activities. Sustainable agricultural practices and soil management are essential to mitigating these adverse effects and preserving crop productivity.

8.13 Ecological and Agricultural Implications

Fluoride toxicity in plants presents serious ecological and agricultural challenges, impacting plant health, soil ecosystems, crop productivity, and food security. Both natural fluoride accumulation in soils and anthropogenic fluoride pollution from industrial emissions or fertilizers can disrupt ecosystems and agriculture. Understanding these broader implications is critical to mitigating fluoride's adverse effects through sustainable practices.

8.13.1 Broader Ecological Consequences

Disruption of Terrestrial Ecosystems: Fluoride accumulation in the environment affects sensitive plant species, reducing biodiversity and altering ecological balance. Sensitive plants exposed to high fluoride levels suffer from symptoms like chlorosis, necrosis, and stunted growth, which compromise their survival and competitive edge in the ecosystem. Species such as *Chenopodium murale* and *Gladiolus* are particularly vulnerable, whereas resistant species like cotton and asparagus exhibit more tolerance (Kumari & Singh, 2019). This variability affects plant community structure, with fluoride-resistant species potentially dominating areas with high fluoride concentrations, thus reducing plant diversity and ecosystem resilience.

Impact on Soil Microflora and Fauna: Fluoride toxicity impacts soil microflora and fauna essential for nutrient cycling. High fluoride levels can disrupt soil microbial communities, reducing populations of beneficial bacteria and fungi that play a vital role in organic matter decomposition and nutrient availability for plants. As these microorganisms decline, the quality of soil decreases, further affecting plant growth and productivity. Additionally, fluoride accumulation affects soil-dwelling organisms like earthworms, which are essential for soil aeration and structure. Fluoride toxicity can reduce earthworm populations, affecting soil health and fertility (Patra et al., 2018).

Food Chain Contamination: Fluoride accumulation in plants also poses a risk to herbivores and animals that feed on contaminated foliage. Fluoride, once absorbed, can concentrate in the plant's leaves and shoots, potentially entering the food chain. This accumulation can lead to fluoride toxicity in grazing animals, particularly in areas near fluoride-emitting industries or where fluoride-contaminated water is used for irrigation. Prolonged exposure in animals can lead to skeletal fluorosis, affecting bones and teeth, thus impacting livestock health and agricultural economies (Sharma & Patni, 2017).

8.13.2 Agricultural Implications

Reduced Crop Yields and Productivity: Fluoride toxicity can significantly reduce crop yields by affecting seed germination, seedling growth, photosynthesis, and nutrient uptake. In crops like *Phaseolus vulgaris* (common bean), fluoride exposure leads to chlorosis, decreased chlorophyll content, and impaired photosynthesis, which lowers yield potential (Chauhan & Agarwal, 2015). Sensitive crops grown in fluoride-contaminated soils often exhibit poor development and lower yields, impacting food security and farmers' economic viability, particularly in fluoride-rich or industrially polluted areas.

Quality Degradation in Agricultural Products: High fluoride levels in soils or irrigation water can degrade the quality of crops, particularly in leafy vegetables and forage crops. Contaminated crops accumulate fluoride, which may affect human health upon consumption. This concern has led to regulatory measures limiting fluoride exposure in agriculture to ensure the safety of food products (Jha & Dubey, 2015).

Mitigation Strategies for Fluoride Toxicity in Agriculture

Soil and Water Management: Implementing soil and water management practices is crucial to mitigate fluoride toxicity in agriculture. Techniques like soil amendments, liming, and the use of phosphate fertilizers can reduce fluoride availability in the soil. These practices help in binding fluoride ions, reducing their uptake by plants and minimizing the risk of toxicity (Kumari & Singh, 2019). Additionally, using fluoride-free or low-fluoride water sources for irrigation can prevent accumulation in agricultural fields.

Breeding and Selection of Fluoride-Resistant Varieties: Developing and selecting fluoride-resistant crop varieties can improve crop tolerance and productivity in areas with high fluoride concentrations. Research into fluoride-resistant genotypes focuses on enhancing traits that limit fluoride uptake or improve detoxification capacity within plants. Crops like cotton and asparagus are naturally more fluoride-resistant and can serve as models for breeding more tolerant varieties (Sharma et al., 2017).

Buffer Planting and Phytoremediation: Buffer planting involves using fluoride-resistant plants as barriers to protect sensitive crops from fluoride exposure. Resistant plants can absorb fluoride, acting as buffers and reducing fluoride spread. Furthermore, phytoremediation strategies use plants that accumulate fluoride without showing toxic symptoms, allowing gradual fluoride removal from the soil. Certain species, including some grasses and shrubs, have shown promise in phytoremediation efforts for contaminated sites (Patra et al., 2018).

Awareness and Regulatory Measures: Raising awareness among farmers about fluoride toxicity and implementing guidelines for fluoride management is essential for sustainable agriculture. Regulatory bodies can enforce emission standards for industries and set guidelines for fluoride levels in fertilizers and water. This approach can help prevent fluoride contamination in agricultural areas and ensure the long-term health of ecosystems and agricultural productivity.

9. Conclusion

This review highlights the extensive impacts of fluoride toxicity on plant health, revealing that sodium fluoride, commonly encountered in industrial emissions and agricultural practices, exerts complex effects on plants. Fluoride impairs essential metabolic processes, including photosynthesis, respiration, nitrogen metabolism, and nutrient dynamics. This interference not only affects fundamental physiological functions but also inhibits photosynthetic pigments and antioxidative enzymes, which play a crucial role in protecting plants from oxidative stress. The result is a cascade of detrimental effects, from cellular disruptions to chlorosis, necrosis, and ultimately reduced growth and yield. Sensitive plants like *Chenopodium murale* and *Gladiolus* are particularly vulnerable, whereas certain species demonstrate relative tolerance, underscoring the variability in fluoride sensitivity among different plants.

The review also discusses the ecological and agricultural consequences of fluoride accumulation. Fluoride pollution poses a risk to biodiversity by altering ecosystem balance, affecting soil health, and contaminating the food chain, which in turn impacts herbivores and potentially human health. From an agricultural perspective, fluoride toxicity reduces crop yield, quality, and overall productivity, presenting a serious concern for food security, especially in regions with high fluoride concentrations in soil or water.

Given the significant implications for both natural ecosystems and agriculture, there is a need for more focused research to understand the mechanisms by which sodium fluoride affects plant health and productivity. Future studies should delve into the molecular and cellular pathways involved in fluoride toxicity, explore genetic variations in fluoride tolerance, and develop mitigation strategies, such as breeding fluoride-resistant plant varieties. Additionally, examining fluoride interactions with other environmental stressors and pollutants will provide a more comprehensive picture of its ecological and agricultural impact. Addressing these research gaps will be essential for formulating sustainable strategies to manage fluoride toxicity and enhance crop resilience, ensuring food security and ecological health in fluoride-affected regions.

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