



# Both sides in fluoride debate claim a victory

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Both sides in the ongoing water fluoridation debate claimed victories last week when a Health Canada report called for the reduction of fluoride in drinking water.

Dr. Larry Levin, president of the Ontario Dental Association, said that it reaffirmed the safety of adding fluoride to water even though they've adjusted the optimal level to 0.7 parts per million from 0.8 ppm.

"As new information comes along, and as we find out what other availability of fluoride is there, this makes sure the cumulative effects remain within a very healthy range," said Levin, who has been practising dentistry for 29 years in the Hamilton area. "They've tweaked it and slightly reduced the level.

"But their overall findings from a health standpoint and a safety standpoint were overwhelming about the safety and efficiency of fluoride in the drinking water."

Last week Levin, and the Ontario Dental Association, called on communities to stand up for water fluoridation as an important preventative measure for good health. Speaking at a symposium on designing dental programs for high-risk children, he urged a review of the facts provided by medical experts from the Centre for Disease Control in the U.S. to Health Canada.

"Water fluoridation helps prevent tooth decay -- it's just that simple," said Levin. "It's preventative care that will help for a life."

Levin said critics of water fluoridation often cite the most recent studies, including a review earlier this year by Scientific American, that water fluoridation has a negligible effect or even an adverse one due to high exposure.

But the findings of the expert panel that Health Canada struck regarding water fluoridation, which included three scientist who questioned the practice, concluded that it didn't contribute to bone cancer and some of the more serious concerns.

"They've addressed the concerns in terms of skeletal fluorosis, cancer, intelligence quotient, fracture and immunotoxicity," said Levin. "In each one of them the weight of evidence does not support a link to exposure to fluoride and an increase risk of cancer.

Local opponents of water fluoridation, who have convinced the City of Waterloo to put the practice on the ballot during the next municipal election in 2010, interpreted those finding another way.

It reaffirmed what they were saying in terms of reducing the concentration of fluoride in the water, and Health Canada's move gave their claims more validity.

Carole Clinch, with People for Safe Drinking Water, said their is still a concern with dental fluorosis and that Health Canada continues to tweak the optimal level of fluoride in the water while never setting the level it shouldn't exceed.

She said recent studies in fluoridated communities around the Hamilton area show that dental fluorosis continues to increase exponentially even as local municipalities review the use of fluoride.

"Health Canada has had a tough time getting optimal concentrations," said Clinch, who is a noted peer reviewer of the research regarding fluoridation. "In the last eight years Health Canada has adjusted the level three times.

"It seems that they're struggling with the optimal level. It was up to 1.2 ppm in 1999, and now they're recommending 0.7 ppm -- that's

almost half."

And while the Ontario Dental Association said the Health Canada study reaffirms the safety of fluoridation, Clinch said it still doesn't address the cumulative effect or concern about hydrofluorosilicic acid itself.

"Drinking fluoridated water doesn't work, using it topically does work -- it's just that simple," said Clinch in response to the Ontario Dental Association's assertions. "Why not use the method of delivery that works best?"

Robert Fleming of Waterloo Watch said it was a do-nothing move on the part of Health Canada because in the eight years that Ontario has had a standard of 0.8 ppm, dental fluorosis rates, causing mottled and discoloured teeth, continued to increase among children in fluoridated communities.

"To me that speaks volumes," said Fleming. "They say preventing dental fluorosis is an important piece but for eight years rates continued to increase.

"What's that all about?"

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