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## Fluoride critic feels vindicated by federal study

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WATERLOO REGION

A local activist who is against fluoride in drinking water says a recent Health Canada study suggesting there are risks to fluoridation is finally a step in the right direction.

"It's a beginning," said Robert Fleming of WaterlooWatch, a grassroots organization trying to raise public awareness of concerns about fluoridation. "I'm happy the truth is starting to crack the surface. It's giving credibility to our position."

Fleming said he will present a paper to the International Society for Fluoride Research at a conference in Toronto from Aug 7 to 11.

A study commissioned by Health Canada suggests there are risks to fluoride exposure, particularly to children. The report says the levels of fluoride in drinking water should be reduced to 0.7 parts per million from the current guideline allowing a range of 0.8 ppm to 1ppm.

The study goes on to say children should use low-fluoride toothpaste and recommends that makers of infant formula reduce fluoride levels in their products.

Research has linked fluoride exposure to fluorosis, a mottling of children's teeth. Critics also point to research linking the chemical to certain cancers.

In Waterloo, where water is fluoridated, the levels of fluoride are within the provincial range of 0.5 to 0.8, which is lower than the current federal recommendations, said Liana Nolan, the region's medical officer of health.

Nolan said the federal study is now aligning itself with the levels of fluoride in Ontario. Local citizens should have no worries in drinking fluoridated water that meets provincial standards, she said.

"Fluoridation at the current levels is a good thing to do," she said.

Nolan favours water fluoridation as a safe and cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay.

But she supports the federal study because fluoride levels need to be monitored closely and "we need to continue to be vigilant."

Nolan said the study will have little impact on Waterloo Region. The region fluoridates the water in Waterloo and parts of Woolwich Townships. Kitchener water doesn't have fluoride, but Cambridge water gets natural fluoridation.

Fluoride has been in Waterloo's water since 1967, but this could soon change. Under the Fluoridation Act of Ontario, municipalities are allowed to add fluoride -- hydrofluorosilicic acid -- to drinking water.

In May, regional council agreed to allow Waterloo to hold a plebiscite on water fluoridation. In the 2010 municipal election, Waterloo voters will be asked whether they want to keep fluoride in the drinking water.

Regional clerk Kris Fletcher said the study could affect the amount of fluoride put into water in Waterloo at some point.

The region will take its cues from the health professionals, she said.

"We are the people with the water," Fletcher said.

"We put the fluoride in as an additive based on the evidence from Health Canada."

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