



Fluoride debate subject of referendum

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Gail Martin - Independent Editor

Residents of Elmira and St.

Jacobs will be facing an extra question on their ballot this municipal election — whether to continue the fluoridation of their water.

Elmira and St. Jacobs residents have had fluoridated water piped to their homes ever since the discovery of NDMA in Elmira's drinking water.

Now, opponents to the practice — who claim a variety of health problems associated with hydrofluosilicic acid (the form of fluoride used) — are hoping that voters will reject fluoridation.

Robert Fleming, of Waterloo Watch, says that there are no scientific studies that truly back up the claim that adding fluoride to our water actually reduces the incident of dental caries.

And, adds Fleming, the form of fluoride used actually contains traces of arsenic, mercury and lead. "There are no safe levels of arsenic," said Fleming, who added that arsenic has been known to cause cancer, even at relatively low concentrations.

Fleming said that the vast majority of European nations have rejected fluoridation, and that there is one nagging question many fluoride opponents have — if pharmaceutical grade fluoride provided by our dentists is not safe to swallow, why is it safe to swallow fluoride found in our drinking water?

Excess fluoride can cause fluorosis, which can cause significant damage to the enamel of teeth. In severe cases, fluorosis also affects bones, as fluoride has a natural affinity for calcium, leaching it out of both teeth and bones.

As well, said Fleming, fluoride can impair thyroid function — and is actually prescribed in some cases to those who have overactive thyroids. The impact on the general public is something that Fleming suggests is a cause for concern.

"It's simply not worth the risk," said Fleming.

"Who controls how much fluoridated water you drink every day?" asked Fleming. "There is no control for dosages, no control over who is getting fluoride, or how much."

However, according to Dr. Liana Nolan, medical officer of health for the Region of Waterloo, the risk of overexposure to fluoride through drinking water is quite low.

"If you take too much, it's not good for you," said Nolan. "At really high levels, fluoride is not good. At lower levels, it reduces tooth decay. The actual concentration (in the water) takes into account the amount you would consume."

Nolan said that the world started adding fluoride to the water when they noticed that areas in which residents consumed water with naturally occurring fluoride had a lower incidence of cavities. In the 1950s and 1960s, many communities, including Waterloo, started adding fluoride to the water.

Nolan said there are multiple studies that suggest fluoridation reduces the incidence of cavities in children by 30 to 50 per cent, and in adults by 27 per cent.

"The bottom line is that when fluoride is added to drinking water in appropriate concentrations, it's a safe and effective way to reduce cavities," said Nolan.

She said the major benefit of fluoridation is that it helps all residents across the board, and across all income levels.

Fluoridation is also supported by many organizations in the world, said Nolan, including the World Health Organization, and the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, along with the Canadian Dental Association.

And, added Nolan, when residents enjoy overall dental health, they are much more likely to enjoy good health in general.

"It's not just about teeth, it's about your general overall well-being and health," said Nolan.

The Region of Waterloo has provided information on fluoridation on its website, at www.region.waterloo.on.ca, under the "Public Health" tab.

For the alternate argument, see www.waterloowatch.com.

The municipal election is set for Monday, Oct. 25. The results of the referendum will be binding if at least 50 per cent of eligible voters casting their ballots on election day vote on the question.



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