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## Fluoride plebiscite decision deferred

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WATERLOO

Waterloo residents won't know until next month whether there will be a plebiscite in the 2010 municipal election on the contentious issue of keeping fluoride in that city's drinking water.

For more than two hours yesterday, regional councillors heard from both sides of the debate. Councillors deferred a decision until they had more information on whether such a plebiscite would be binding.

The delay angered Robert Fleming, a Waterloo resident who wants water fluoridation in that city to end.

"We asked them for an immediate stop of this dangerous practice," he said.

In January, Waterloo council voted to hold a plebiscite on fluoride and referred the issue to regional councillors, who have legislative control. The stumbling block for regional council was a conflict between two pieces of provincial legislation on the issue of whether a plebiscite would be binding.

Under the Municipal Elections Act, there must be 50 per cent voter turnout and more than 50 per cent of the votes must be in favour of the question for the result of a municipal plebiscite to be binding.

"It is designed that no plebiscite will ever be passed because of the 50 per cent voter turnout requirement," said Cambridge Mayor Doug Craig.

Under the Fluoridation Act, only a majority vote is needed for a binding ruling, regional clerk Kris Fletcher said in a report. Staff with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing recommended the region proceed under the less restrictive Fluoridation Act, she said.

But councillors wanted more information before proceeding. "If we have a plebiscite and it is not binding, what is the point?" Waterloo Coun. Jane Mitchell asked.

Since the region has the authority to stop fluoridation, Craig suggested that instead of a plebiscite, council vote on the issue after holding public meetings.

Fleming said a 1979 Quebec Ministry of the Environment report found a marked correlation between increased cancer mortality rates and artificial fluoridation of public water supplies. Other harmful effects include bone cancer, fluorosis and suppressed thyroid function, he said.

Dr. Mitra Doherty, a Waterloo dentist, said there is a lot of confusion about fluoride in the local dental community, and one of the biggest concerns is that children are getting too much fluoride from water and toothpaste.

"We are getting over-fluoridated," she said.

Liana Nolan, the region's medical officer of health, told councillors that she favours water fluoridation as a safe and cost-effective way to prevent tooth decay.

The rate of cavities among elementary school children in the region is highest in Kitchener at 44 per cent, followed by Cambridge at 33 per cent and Waterloo at 32 per cent. Kitchener doesn't fluoridate its water and Cambridge has natural fluoridation in its water, councillors were told.

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