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## Fluoride program for four schools

GREG MACDONALD, Chronicle Staff

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Four Waterloo Region schools will be part of a fluoride varnish pilot program as part of a new Public Health initiative.

The program comes in response to regional councillors' request to find alternatives to water fluoridation after Waterloo voted to end the practice in a November referendum.

Under the program, four schools with populations "at high risk" for dental decay will be targeted.

Parents of students at the school will have the option to have their children's teeth treated with a fluoride varnish.

Public Health officials will require signed permission slips from parents before students are treated, said Dr. Liana Nolan, the region's chief medical officer of health. One school in Waterloo will be selected, along with one school each in Kitchener, Cambridge and the townships.

Coun. Jane Brewer was uneasy about the program.

"I don't want the same people standing at the microphone saying they didn't want this," Brewer said.

Fluoride opponents were concerned about the chemicals used to fluoridate water and the consequences of ingesting the chemical, Regional Chair Ken Seiling said.

Under the varnish program, no fluoride is ingested into the body, he added.

"We didn't have a referendum on whether we should provide fluoride to children in schools," he said.

The program is meant to be an alternative for families who can't afford dental treatments, Seiling said.

Parents who don't want to have their children's teeth treated with the varnish would not have to, he said.

"I think it would be irresponsible for us not offer this program," Seiling said.

Mayor Brenda Halloran cautioned Public Health officials to be sensitive to concerns when the program is rolled out in Waterloo.

"If there's an issue, I'll get the first e-mail about it," she said.

Public Health is also monitoring how dental health in Waterloo is affected now that fluoride has been removed from the water.

In November, Waterloo citizens voted 50.5 per cent in favour of removing fluoride from the city's water supply.

Waterloo was the only city in the region practicing fluoridation.

The pilot program will start in select schools beginning in September.

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