



TheRecord.com

<http://news.therecord.com/article/695068>

[\[Close\]](#)

## Let the fluoride debate begin

The public water supply should be controlled by the public. Period.

When citizens, when voters, when taxpayers turn on their taps, they should be able to trust that what comes out is safe and that if any fears, any problems, any breakdowns arise, they will be addressed promptly and effectively. Because that's what a public water supply really means. And there is nothing more fundamental to the health of a human body than the water that goes into it and keeps it alive.

With this in mind, residents in Waterloo, Elmira, St. Jacobs and a small part of Kitchener should welcome the opportunity that awaits them this fall to decide whether the water that pours out of their taps and down their throats will continue to be fluoridated. And they should applaud the government of Waterloo Region for the way it has so far handled the contentious issue of this fluoridation referendum.

It is the region that controls the local water supply and the cities and two of the townships that distribute it. At this time, the water is artificially fluoridated only in Waterloo, Elmira, St. Jacobs and a portion of Kitchener. While regional health officials maintain that fluoridated water is a safe and effective way to improve dental health and cut down on dental cavities, many people in Waterloo believe they have enough evidence, much of it gleaned from studies in recent years, to prove that the practice should cease.

This newspaper has yet to form an opinion on whether local water should be fluoridated. That said, we enthusiastically support the referendum that will be held Oct. 25 — municipal election day in Ontario.

In a promising start to the referendum debate, the regional government has tentatively approved a straightforward and intelligent referendum question. Every voter who gets artificially fluoridated water will be asked: "Should the Region of Waterloo fluoridate your municipal water? Yes or No?"

Opponents of fluoridation were pushing for a different question. They wanted the region to ask residents if they wanted hydrofluorosilic acid added to their water because that is the substance used in the local fluoridation process. Those opponents have a point.

But adding hydrofluorosilic acid is just one way to fluoridate water. It could be argued that even if voters rejected having this specific substance in their water, the region could still opt for another form of fluoridation. One opponent proposed asking two questions — one covering hydrofluorosilic acid, the other fluoridation in general.

Surely such an option is needlessly complex and could result in a split decision — one that cut hydrofluorosilic acid out of the water supply but instructed the region to continue fluoridating in a different way. Such an outcome would only prolong this debate. The question favoured by the region is short, simple and unambiguous. Regional council should give this question its stamp of approval on April 14.

The regional government has done even more to support this referendum. In upholding basic principles of democracy, the region has voted to abide by the outcome of the referendum, whatever voter turnout should be. That's an important decision, particularly for the fluoride opponents. Without it, the vote result would have only been binding on the region if half of registered voters cast ballots.

Since turnout at a municipal election is usually between 20 and 30 per cent, the referendum was virtually guaranteed to result in a defeat for the fluoride opponents. Good for the region for leaving this decision in the voters' hands — regardless of how many of those hands mark ballots. Good for the region, also, for ensuring that every resident who gets fluoridated water, regardless of where that resident lives, will be entitled to vote in this referendum.

Now, let the debate begin. We urge voters to become informed on this subject, to listen carefully to the arguments both pro and con and to judiciously decide what should be done. Then, we urge them to cast their ballots.

TheRecord.com

<http://news.therecord.com/article/695068>



© Copyright 2007 Metroland Media Group Ltd. All rights reserved. The reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission or republication of any material from [www.thespec.com](http://www.thespec.com) is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Metroland Media Group Ltd.

