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# Study suggests fluoride is not effective when swallowed

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Recent findings in the Journal of Public Health Dentistry show that preventing cavities has little to do with swallowing fluoride, says the research co-ordinator for People for Safe Drinking Water.

The local group is a driving force behind a move to get fluoride out of the City of Waterloo's drinking water. Waterloo voters will get a chance to have their say on the important public health matter during a plebiscite scheduled for the 2010 municipal elections.

But in the meantime, supporters for both sides have been squaring off in the pages of the Waterloo Chronicle. The incoming president of the Waterloo-Wellington Dental Society, Jacqueline Sieber, made her case in defence of the practice citing recent findings, including some from Health Canada that state fluoride is safe and effective and should be kept in our water.

However, Carole Clinch, who has done most of the literature review for the local opponents of fluoridation, said the facts are out there — but when it's said in a public health journal, defenders of the practice can no longer ignore it.

She based her argument on the Iowa Fluoride Study, which was recently released in the fall 2008 edition of the Journal of Public Health Dentistry. The Iowa study, which began in 1992, followed a group of kids since birth and measured fluoride use, and documented the number of cavities and the cases of fluorosis, which is a sign of too much exposure.

The study's authors reported that: "The benefits of fluoride are mostly topical, while fluorosis is clearly more dependent on fluoride intake."

Clinch said they went on to explain how the early hypothesis that fluoride needed to be swallowed early in life to prevent cavities is no longer valid.

"They don't recommend that any government agency affirm fluoride concentration in water anymore," said Clinch. "It's simply a bad idea."

Evidence also suggests that it only works topically and in concentrations that are never reached in fluoridated water. "The top researchers are saying that it works topically, it doesn't work by swallowing it," said Clinch.

Those findings follow a statement by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment in the fall that they don't support the fluoridation of drinking water. The group's reasons include the fact declines in dental carries in fluoridated communities matched a similar decline in non-fluoridated communities.

They were also worried that the incidents of toxic effects in humans may well be underestimated and current evidence suggested caution in dealing with fluoridation instead of continuing with past practices.

"You simply can't control the dose," said Clinch, adding that fluoride can be found in almost everything as a byproduct of our industrial economy.

"If it's in everything, everywhere, you don't have to look for fluoride — it will find you."

Clinch said supporters of water fluoridation often cite the Center for Disease Control in the U. S. for their support of the practice — as well as the U. S. public health service's assertion that it is one of the 10 great achievements of the 20th century — but even the CDC's research is about topical applications.

"They're using that as evidence for swallowing it at low doses," she said. "The evidence now is that we need toothpaste to be 5,000 parts per million to have an effect.

"Water is only 0.5 parts per million."

Clinch said there is no study that has been done to take into account the "confounding" variables when it comes to fluoridation. Those are all the potential things that can influence cavity rates.

She said controlling diet and addressing the socio-economic status of the children prone to carries would do more to eliminate cavities than water fluoridation.

"They come right out at the top," said Clinch. "When you control those two variables alone, virtually all the differences are eliminated."

Clinch said she will be presenting some of those findings at an upcoming health conference, and that the public should insist on seeing better research in this ongoing debate.

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