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Waterloo votes No fluoride

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It won by the thinnest of margins, but Waterloo voters decided to turn off the tap on water fluoridation for the first time since the practice started in 1967.

It took until the final two polls for the No side to eke out a victory with 50.3 per cent of the vote. When all the fluoridated areas in Elmira and Kitchener were added to the tally the No side won by 195 votes out of 30,727 total votes cast on the plebiscite question.

It's been more than 28 years since Waterloo last voted on water fluoridation, but those concerned about adding hydrofluorosilicic acid to local drinking water said worries about side effects and the lack of personal choice required another referendum.

"The vote in Waterloo has always been close," said Executive Director of WaterlooWatch Robert Fleming, who has been fighting to turn off water fluoridation for the past four years.

"Those who voted for fluoridation last time enjoyed 28 years of fluoridated water. It's time to give the No side the same consideration."

Local dentist Dr. Harry Hoediono, the president-elect of the Ontario Dental Association, was saddened by the result and predicted an increase in cavity rates for Waterloo.

"The Ontario Dental Association is disappointed that the residents of Waterloo have voted no to fluoridating their municipal water," he said in a statement. "While we respect their decision, we want to remind citizens of the overwhelming benefits of water fluoridation.

"Fluoride is one of the best preventive measures we have against dental decay. It strengthens the tooth enamel and helps reverse the infectious process of decay. Dental decay is one of the leading causes of absences from school and if left untreated can lead to a host of other illnesses.

"Water fluoridation benefits all populations — especially the elderly and infirm — who might not have the manual dexterity to effectively apply fluoridated toothpastes."

"Over 90 international and national health organizations support the public health benefits of water fluoridation. We believe that water fluoridation, in the right amount, is safe, effective and good for your health."

Fleming said he'll be watching closely whether the region follows through on a commitment to honour the result of the referendum even though it is not binding.

"The vote is the vote, and no means no," he said. "I don't know why fluoridation would be treated any differently."

Regional Chair Ken Seiling said he thinks council will honour that commitment. "Council agreed to do that barring a motion from council, which I would be very surprised to see that," he said.

Returning regional councillor Sean Strickland said it was a narrow vote but the community has spoken.

“There’s no equivocation on my part,” Strickland said. “It was a no vote . . . and we’ll see how soon and how quickly we can begin decommissioning the fluoridation of the Waterloo water.”

Coun. Jane Mitchell, a strong advocate for water fluoridation also accepted the vote. “No is no, so I will support turning it off.”

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