

Lengthy debate expected on water fluoridation

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There's something in the water, and Regional officials want it to stay that way.

Halton's health department is recommending the Region continue to add fluoride to municipal water, according to a special fluoridation report that will be up for debate January 31.

During what's sure to be a marathon Regional council meeting, 16 delegates are currently registered to speak to the issue. Some of those speakers include the chief medical officer of health for Ontario's Ministry of Health and Health Canada's chief dental officer along with four Halton residents.

A number of residents from Halton to as far as London and Waterloo have already submitted their written opinions to Regional staff.

Halton's 21-member council has a lot of reading to do before the much-awaited vote. Councillors' fluoride information packages include a 12-page report debunking what's described as "anti-fluoridation rhetoric and misinformation" and 17 separate scholarly papers on fluoridation facts.

Whether to continue water fluoridation or not came before the council of the day in November 2008 when councillors voted to defer making a decision on the practice until Health Cana-

da released a report on fluoridation.

At the time, Halton Hills Councillor Clark Somerville motioned to stop fluoridating Regional water once current supplies of fluoride are used up and current contracts expire. The motion was endorsed by the health and social services committee but deferred by Regional council.

That was more than three years ago and that's how long some Halton residents have waited to have their say on the controversial issue.

Dental and health professionals say fluoridating water is an effective way of reducing tooth decay. The American Dental Association says water fluoridation is effective in reducing 20 to 40 per cent of tooth decay.

However anti-fluoridation advocates say ingesting fluoride on an on-going basis can lead to serious health concerns including thyroid disease.

The Regional report that'll be voted on by council touches on studies from China and India that show a link between consuming water with high concentrations of fluoride— at least 3.0 parts per million (ppm)— and lower IQs in children.

"The primary problem with IQ stud-



ies is that they did not account for the many other factors that contribute to intellectual development in children," states the Halton report. "In addition, the fluoride levels in drinking water consumed by case subjects in both the IQ and thyroid stud-

ies are much higher than would be allowed in Ontario."

The Canadian maximum concentration of fluoride in drinking water is 1.5 ppm. In Halton, there's a 0.7 ppm fluoride level target.

The findings of the Health Canada report came to light last summer and states the agency doesn't support a link between exposure to fluoride in drinking water and adverse health effects.

Dental fluorosis, a condition caused by the over-ingestion of fluoride and results in white spots on the teeth, is often a cause of concern for Halton parents. Regional data from 2007 to 2009 shows about 10 per cent of seven-year-olds, 15 per cent of nine-year-olds and 17 per cent of 13-year-olds in Halton have mild fluorosis. Data from 2005 to 2007 shows mild fluorosis rates were 11 per cent, 26 per cent and 22 per cent, for children aged seven, nine and 13, respectively.

Mild fluorosis is mainly cosmetic

and doesn't affect the tooth function, according to the report. In its most severe form, brown staining and pitting occurs on the tooth surface. The latest data shows 0.3 per cent of 13-year-olds in Halton have severe fluorosis.

The 2010 annual cost of water fluoridation in Halton was \$268,646— \$145,836 to purchase hydrofluorosilicic acid and \$122,810 for the parts and labour for the fluoridation system.

According to the Canadian Dental Association, as of 2007 45.1 per cent of the Canadian population had access to fluoridated water supplies. The percentage of the population with fluoridated water ranges widely, from 3.7 per cent in B.C., 6.4 per cent in Quebec and 1.5 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador to 75.9 per cent in Ontario and 69.9 per cent in Manitoba.

A vote to end water fluoridation in Waterloo last October narrowly passed by 50.3 per cent. In May of this year, Calgary city council voted to end fluoridation, with an estimated cost saving of \$750,000 a year.

The Region adds fluoride to the water supply in Burlington, Halton Hills, Oakville and the new developments in Milton. Municipal water in old Milton, which is supplied by ground water, doesn't have fluoride added.

Halton Regional council will vote on whether to continue fluoridation in Halton January 31.

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