

DRAFT NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Public Health Supports Fluoridation

TORONTO -- The use of fluoride in drinking water is a safe, effective, and economical way to help prevent dental cavities with no scientifically proven adverse health impacts, according to Ontario public health agencies who voted overwhelmingly in support of the fluoridation of community drinking water at an Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) conference in Toronto last week. When added to water at levels recommended in Ontario and across the country, studies have determined that fluoride is not harmful and the health benefits extend to all residents in a community regardless of age, education or socio-economic status. The fluoridation of drinking water has been used in Canada for over 40 years and between 1979 and 2009 the incidence of dental cavities for children, adolescents and adults has dropped significantly; from 2.5% to 0.5% for children, from 9.2% to 2.5% for adolescents, and from 17.5% to 10.7% for adults.

According to estimates from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it costs about 50 cents per person to fluoridate community water and every \$1 invested yields \$38 in avoided costs for dental treatment. While many communities in Ontario continue the practice of fluoridating drinking water for the benefit of all their citizens, a small number of municipalities have made the decision to stop fluoridation in the past few years. "The argument that fluoridation is no longer required because dental health has improved over the past decades is flawed. Dental health has improved in large part because of the addition of fluoride. Removing fluoride now doesn't make sense," says Valerie Sterling, alPHA President and member of the Toronto Board of Health.

In addition to fluoridation, alPHA is calling on the provincial government to provide support, including provincial legislation and funding to municipalities for the fluoridation of community drinking water. "We want to avoid what happened with tobacco legislation. We had a patchwork of local by-laws until the provincial government implemented the Smoke-Free Ontario legislation. A similar situation exists today with fluoridation resulting in some communities losing the benefit to their dental health," explains Sterling.

In a separate meeting on the same day, the Medical Officers of Health that manage the public health agencies across Ontario voted in support of community drinking water fluoridation. Dr. Paul Roumeliotis, Chair of the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health, a section of alPHA, sees fluoridation as a basic essential to good health.

"As Medical Officers of Health, we see daily the impacts that poor oral health can have on children, on seniors, and on adults. We are also well aware of the disproportionate impacts of poor dental health upon low income populations and often among those newly arrived in Canada from countries with poor dental services and poor water infrastructure."

More than 90 national and international professional health organizations have endorsed the use of fluoride at recommended levels to prevent tooth decay, including the World Health Organization, Health Canada, the Canadian Pediatric Society, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the Ontario Medical Association. alPHA is proud to join their number.

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Fact Sheet

November, 2010

Fluoride & Drinking Water

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in the environment. Fluoride is found in soil, air and water.

At appropriate levels, Fluoride in drinking water has been proven to significantly reduce cavities and dental decay. This finding is strongly supported by an extensive body of Canadian and international research, and has been commonly accepted in the scientific community for almost 70 years.

Scientific guidance on optimal fluoridation levels is routinely reviewed by expert panels convened by Health Canada and conveyed to all provinces and territories.

The most recent Health Canada review, undertaken in 2007, assessed the latest available evidence on the benefits and potential risks. This review concluded that there is no harmful health risk from the fluoridation of community drinking water at current levels and that fluoridation continues to be an effective public health strategy to prevent dental disease.

The City of Toronto's policies and practices in drinking water fluoridation are guided by these expert reviews and recommendations. Toronto Public Health and Toronto Water are committed to ensuring the safety of the Toronto drinking water supply, and protecting the health of Toronto residents.

The dental benefits and safety of fluoridation of drinking water are strongly supported by many health organizations, including the Ontario Medical Association, the Canadian Dental Association, the Ontario Dental Association, the American Dental Association, the Public Health Dentists Association, the Chief Dentist of Canada and the International Association for Dental Research.

Fluoride has been added to the Toronto drinking water supply since 1963. Studies of Toronto children 12 years after the introduction of water fluoridation and again in 2000 show that by 2000, there was a 77.4% mean reduction in decayed, missing and filled baby teeth for five year-old children. There was also a 390% increase in the percentage of children with no tooth decay when compared to rates reported prior to the addition of fluoride in 1963.

This dramatic improvement in dental health is due to a combination of water fluoridation, other sources of fluoride (such as toothpaste), better nutrition and better dental preventive care. Water fluoridation plays an important role in a comprehensive approach to good dental health.

The current target level of fluoride in Toronto drinking water is 0.6 parts per million - a level which is less than the naturally occurring fluoride levels from a number of European and North American water sources, including parts of Ontario.

Fluoride levels in Toronto's drinking water are regulated in Ontario under the Safe Drinking Water Act administered by the Ministry of the Environment.

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Fact Sheet

Fluoride & Drinking Water

Toronto Public Health will continue to monitor expert reviews and recommendations on water fluoridation from provincial, federal and international health research organizations to ensure Toronto residents continue to have appropriate levels of fluoride in drinking water.

For more information:

World Health Organization, (WHO)

http://www.who.int/oral_health/events/oral%20healthc.pdf.

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/fnihb-dgspni/ocdo-bdc/project-eng.php#a6>.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/2008-fluoride-fluorure/index-eng.php>

Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ontario) (CMOH)

<http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/healthy-communities/dental/CMOH-on-Fluoridation.pdf>.

Ontario Medical Association

<https://www.oma.org/Mediaroom/PressReleases/Pages/OntariosDoctorsSetTheRecordStraightOnFlourideInDrinkingWater.aspx>.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/benefits.htm>.

Ontario Dental Association

<http://www.youroralhealth.ca/community-water-fluoridation.html>.

Canadian Dental Association

http://www.cda-adc.ca/_files/position_statements/Fluorides-English-2010-06-08.pdf.

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Association of Local
PUBLIC HEALTH
Agencies

WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

If you have ever had a vaccination, eaten in a restaurant, gone swimming in a public pool, had a home visit from a nurse for advice on breastfeeding or seen a TV ad about the dangers of smoking, you have been served by the public health system.

Public Health is the part of the publicly-funded health system in Ontario that supports overall healthy populations by monitoring community health status, promoting healthy behaviours, identifying, minimizing and eliminating health hazards, investigating and managing disease outbreaks, enforcing health protection laws, and responding to health-related emergencies. It is the ounce of prevention that is worth a pound of cure.

The 36 public health agencies or units across Ontario are each governed by a Board of Health. Each agency is responsible for providing programs and services that support the overall health of the people in one of 36 public health regions.

WHO IS alPHa?

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) is the non-profit organization that provides leadership to boards of health and public health units in Ontario. Our members are the 36 health units across Ontario. alPHa works closely with the senior leadership in our member health units. This includes board of health trustees, medical and associate medical officers of health, and senior public health managers in each of the public health disciplines – nursing, inspections, nutrition, dentistry, health promotion, epidemiology and business administration.

alPHa represents the interests of the 36 public health units in Ontario and lends expertise to members on the governance, administration and management of health units. The Association also collaborates with governments and other health organizations, advocating for healthy public policy and a strong, effective and efficient public health system in the province.

WHAT WE DO

We represent not only the diversity of public health disciplines of our members, but also the diversity of public health needs in Ontario's communities, through effective communication and collaboration among members as well as with policy makers and other associations. In this, we seek to establish a unified and powerful voice for public health in Ontario that is consulted and respected, and to provide assistance to our members for the efficient and effective delivery of public health services to their communities.

Through policy analysis, discussion, collaboration, and advocacy, alPHa members and staff act to promote public health policies that form a strong foundation for the improvement of health promotion and protection, disease prevention and surveillance services in all of Ontario's communities.

CONTACT

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