

**OPHA RESOLUTION #1:  
Community Water Fluoridation (2011)  
October 5, 2011**

**Contents:**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Resolution..... | 2 |
| Background..... | 2 |
| References..... | 6 |

**OPHA RESOLUTION: Community Water Fluoridation**

**WHEREAS** about 70% of the Ontario population enjoys the benefits of community water fluoridation; **and**

**WHEREAS** municipalities and Ontario Health Units have been and continue to be faced with determined and persistent efforts to cease community water fluoridation by a small group of committed opponents of fluoridation; **and**

**WHEREAS** the overwhelming scientific evidence from well recognized and reputable researchers and organizations continues to indicate that community water fluoridation is safe, economical, and has proven effectiveness; **and**

**WHEREAS** community water fluoridation is recognized as an important component of maintaining and improving the oral health of all residents by dental, medical and other organizations provincially, federally and internationally; **and**

**WHEREAS** the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention lists the use of fluoride in drinking water as one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; **and**

**WHEREAS** the CDC estimates that for every \$1 invested in community drinking water fluoridation an estimated \$38 for dental treatment is avoided; **and**

**WHEREAS** national public health organizations from countries including Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand all endorse community water fluoridation; **and**

**WHEREAS** the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, outlined the importance of drinking water fluoridation in her statement, “The importance of maintaining good oral health should not be taken lightly – it is an important part of being healthy overall. As tooth decay is the single most common chronic disease among Canadians of all ages and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, heart disease and respiratory conditions, water fluoridation is, and must be recognized as, a very important public health measure”.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the OPHA supports the fluoridation of municipal drinking water and recommends adding under the Safe Drinking Water Act, a regulation change mandating the fluoridation of drinking water at a concentration of 0.5-0.8ppm, with optimal levels at 0.7ppm, as evidence demonstrates that water fluoridation is a safe, economical, and proven public health measure to prevent dental caries in all age groups.

### **Proposed Resolution**

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) supports adding a change to the regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act mandating fluoridation of municipal drinking water at a concentration of 0.5ppm to 0.8ppm, with 0.7ppm representing the optimal fluoride concentration. Water fluoridation is recognized as a safe, economical, and proven public health measure to prevent dental caries in all age groups. OPHA endorses the accompanying information and the statement on drinking water fluoridation from Dr. Arlene King, the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, dated April 4, 2011.

### **Methodology**

A literature review was conducted for reviews of community water fluoridation from 1997 to the present (2011) with a primary focus on locating fluoridation and fluoride policies and position statements from Ontario. The scope of the search was then broadened to include information from a national and international perspective. Information reviewed was completed by researchers, agencies, and organizations that represent the closest professional affiliation with the Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry (OAPHD).

### **Background**

The health benefits of drinking water fluoridation have been well documented since the 1940s and extend to all members of a community, regardless of age, socioeconomic status, education, or employment.<sup>1-23</sup> In fact, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention listed the use of fluoride in drinking water as one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>24</sup>

Globally, the British Fluoridation Society reports that approximately 350 million people have access to optimally fluoridated drinking water including countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is estimated that an additional 50 million individuals have naturally<sup>25</sup> fluoridated drinking water at optimal concentrations.

Across Canada, there are an estimated 14,258,078 (45% of the national population) individuals with access to fluoridated drinking water.<sup>26</sup> In Ontario, optimizing fluoride levels in drinking water commenced in Brantford in 1945 and was quickly adopted by other municipalities throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1,27</sup> Presently there are approximately 8.5 million people (70% of the provincial population) who receive fluoridated drinking water, with fluoride levels being stringently monitored to ensure the optimal level is maintained as required under the Ontario Public Health Standards.<sup>1,26-29</sup>

In 2007, Health Canada convened a panel of experts to provide guidance to Health Canada, including recommendations to ensure that exposure to fluoride remains below levels that could cause adverse health effects while achieving the public health benefit of preventing dental caries.<sup>6</sup> One of the key recommendations outlined by the panel was the adoption of “a level of 0.7 mg/L as the optimal target concentration for fluoride in drinking water, which would prevent excessive intake of fluoride through multiple sources of exposure.”<sup>6</sup> Health Canada is working with the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Drinking Water (CDW) to finalize the Guideline Technical Document on fluoride in drinking water.<sup>28</sup> During the review and update of this document, the CDW assessed all identified health risks associated with fluoride, taking into

account new studies and approaches. The Guideline Technical Document establishes a “maximum acceptable concentration (MAC) of 1.5 mg/L for fluoride in drinking water”.<sup>28</sup> The Guideline Technical Document has now finished public consultation on its risk assessment, has been modified to address relevant comments and been approved through the appropriate Federal/Provincial/Territorial processes. It is expected to be published on the Health Canada website in spring/summer 2011.

Across the province similar recommendations have been endorsed by organizations such as OAPHD and alPHa, with the later drafting a fluoridation of drinking water resolution outlining “support for the practice of community fluoridation as a proven, cost-effective, safe and equitable public health intervention that significantly contributes to improving the overall health of the population.”<sup>30</sup> The alPHa resolution further called “for the Province of Ontario to provide support, including provincial legislation and funding to municipalities for the fluoridation of community drinking water.”<sup>30</sup>

Overall, more than 100 national and international professional health organizations have endorsed the use of water fluoridation to prevent tooth decay<sup>1,30-47</sup> and the reviews completed by the CDW<sup>28</sup>, Health Canada Expert Panel<sup>6</sup>, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec<sup>8</sup>, and the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia<sup>13</sup> have made the following key observations:

- fluoridation is safe;
- no evidence has been found that it causes cancer, bone disease, kidney disease, birth defects or other adverse health effects;
- there is no evidence that adding fluoride to the drinking water has negative environmental impact;
- fluoridation is still effective even though other sources of fluoride such as toothpastes and topical fluorides, are used;
- fluoridation benefits all residents served by community water supplies regardless of their social or economic status; and,
- fluoridation is the most cost-effective means of delivering the benefits of fluoride to whole communities.

### **Water Fluoridation: Support and Challenges**

Nationally and internationally the benefits of water fluoridation have been well documented. Over the past 30 years, the incidence of dental decay has declined considerably in countries such as Australia, Ireland, and the United States where most of the largest cities, including Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington DC have fluoridated water supplies.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, the effects of removing fluoride from drinking water systems have also been observed.<sup>1</sup> For example, a 2007 report on water fluoridation by the Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec revealed that the percentage of kindergarten children at high risk of developing tooth decay in Dorval, Quebec doubled in the two year period after water fluoridation was halted in 2003.<sup>8</sup>

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence outlining the safety and efficacy of community water fluoridation from around the world, a determined group of committed anti-fluoridationists

persists in pressuring local authorities to stop fluoridation.<sup>7</sup> Opponents to water fluoridation primarily cite a link between fluoride exposure and Osteosarcoma (Bone Cancer), Kidney Disease, Hypothyroidism, and Dental Fluorosis.<sup>49</sup> Dental fluorosis, resulting from over exposure to fluoride, ranges in characteristics from a chalky discolouration of the tooth surface to enamel loss.<sup>49</sup>

Results from the Oral Health component of the Canadian Health Measures Survey (2007-2009), indicate that when using Dean's Index the number of children (6-12 years) displaying moderate or severe fluorosis, when combined, represented a prevalence too low to allow reporting (less than 0.3%).<sup>50</sup> Evidence such as this calls into question the rigour and validity of studies and reviews that proclaim the connection between fluoride and chronic illnesses. The CDW report raises attention to "the weight of evidence from all currently available studies does not support a link between exposure to fluoride in drinking water at 1.5mg/L and any adverse health effects, including those related to cancer, immunotoxicity, reproductive/developmental toxicity, genotoxicity and/or neurotoxicity. It also does not support a link between fluoride exposure and intelligence quotient deficit, as there are significant concerns regarding the available studies, including quality, credibility, and methodological weaknesses."<sup>28</sup>

In a recent review completed by City of Hamilton, Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, she concluded that "...research confirms the effectiveness of water fluoridation in preventing dental caries (cavities) in the modern context."<sup>51</sup> The review further summarized that recent evidence has confirmed that "dental fluorosis remains the only risk at the low levels of exposure in fluoridated water."<sup>51</sup> Such findings are further supported through a Public Health Agency of Canada funded review (Draft) that specifies there is "...no clear evidence for an association between drinking water fluoridation and other health outcomes."<sup>52</sup>

In the last decade, numerous municipalities in Ontario (e.g., Aitikokan, Brantford, Dryden, Halton Region, Hamilton, Hastings District, London, Muskoka, Norfolk, Niagara Falls, Peel Region, Toronto, Tottenham, and Waterloo) have been challenged to discontinue community water fluoridation.<sup>53</sup> Although some communities have sustained water fluoridation, such as Toronto, where the Board of Health recently (May 2011) decided not to initiate any changes to the status of Toronto community water fluoridation.<sup>29</sup> In other communities, some of these challenges have led to decisions by city or regional councils to cease community water fluoridation; the most recent discontinuation of fluoridation occurred in Waterloo following a plebiscite.<sup>51,54</sup>

In response to these local water fluoride eliminations and growing support for anti-fluoridation movements in other provinces, as witnessed by the March 2011 Calgary City Council decision to discontinue community water fluoridation<sup>55</sup>, Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, released a statement expressing her concern "...about the loss of fluoridated drinking water in certain communities in spite of consistent evidence that water fluoridation is safe and effective."<sup>1</sup> The provincial support of fluoridation is echoed by the members of the OAPHD and will be cited at future debates on the fluoridation issue. The OAPHD further urges all associations with an interest in the oral health of Ontarians, including the Ontario Public Health Association, to support and endorse community water fluoridation and the statement by Dr. King.

**Funding for Water Fluoridation**

Local governments can submit an application for capital funding to Infrastructure Canada. These funds may be for new equipment and/or facilities or the replacement of existing equipment and/or facilities.<sup>56</sup>

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