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Member of the European Parliament

Mr Seán O'Callaghan
Senior Executive Officer
Cork County Council
County Hall
Cork

05 November 2014

Dear Seán

I write again in relation to our previous correspondence regarding the motion on fluoridation of the public water supply, and now enclose latest response I have received from Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar TD, in relation to same.

I trust this is of assistance.

Kind regards

Is mise le meas


BRIAN CROWLEY MEP





31 October 2014

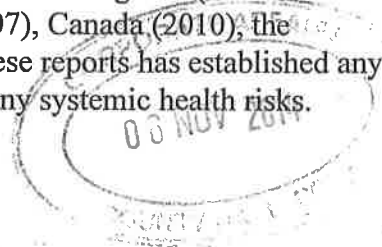
Mr Brian Crowley M.E.P.
Maryborough Lodge
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Cork

Dear Brian

I wish to thank you for your recent letter on behalf of Mr Seán O'Callaghan, Senior Executive Officer, Cork County Council, concerning fluoridation of public water.

Water fluoridation is the adjustment of the natural concentration of fluoride in drinking water to the optimal recommended level for the prevention of dental caries (tooth decay). The benefits of water fluoridation have been known for decades and continue to be confirmed by oral health studies. In the All-Island survey of Children's Oral Health (2002), decay levels were found to be considerably lower in lifetime residents of fluoridated areas in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland, which does not have fluoridated water. A recent study by Public Health England (2014) compared fluoridated and non-fluoridated parts of England and found that in fluoridated areas there are 45% fewer hospital admissions of children aged one to four for dental caries (mostly for extraction of decayed teeth under a general anaesthetic) than in non-fluoridated areas.

Cork County Council expressed concerns that the review of fluoridation conducted by the Forum on Fluoridation (2002) was out of date. However, my Department keeps the policy of water fluoridation under constant review. As part of this ongoing work, a review of evidence on the impact of water fluoridation at its current level on the health of the population is being conducted by the Health Research Board on behalf of my Department. It is due to be completed by the end of the year. Systematic and comprehensive reviews of fluoridation have also been conducted in many other countries, including the United Kingdom (York Review 2000 and the Medical Research Council 2002), Australia (2007), Canada (2010), the European Union (2011) and New Zealand (2014). None of these reports has established any basis for considering that artificially fluoridated water poses any systemic health risks.



The Council is of the view that consumers should be given a choice. The ethical and legal dimension of fluoridation was considered by the Supreme Court in *Ryan v Attorney General* (1963) and by the Forum on Fluoridation (2002). This was also dealt with more recently in the United Kingdom, by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007). It recognises the tensions between protecting personal autonomy and promoting the welfare of all:

“From an ethical and practical standpoint, an important dimension of public health policy is therefore to balance the liberal emphasis on choice and autonomy with the imperative to support those who do not have the opportunities to choose because of, for instance, poverty or dependency.”

Fluoridated water does pose any systemic health risks. It does not not smell or taste differently from un-fluoridated water. Therefore the “consumer choice” argument is essentially a debate about whether individuals who have a personal preference not to drink water containing 0.6 - 0.8 parts per million of fluoride should be provided with such water. As the provision of unfluoridated water would prevent the rest of society enjoying the considerable benefits afforded by fluoridation my view is that the common good should prevail.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for you.

Yours sincerely



Leo Varadkar T.D.
Minister for Health



