

**Speaking Notes – Graham L. Pollett,  
Medical Officer of Health**

**Public Meeting – Fluoridation (Centennial Hall) 7:00 pm January 25, 2012**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this public meeting on the fluoridation of London's drinking water.

I want to begin by reassuring residents that the amount of fluoride added to the City's drinking water poses no health risk. And in fact, fluoridation has been proven to be an effective strategy in the prevention of tooth decay, especially in young children.

I'm here tonight in several capacities – as the Medical Officer of Health, as a physician and as a resident of this community.

Our role in public health, in essence, is to promote healthy living, prevent disease, and to identify and implement strategies that aim to optimize health for ALL Londoners.

Our decision making process is based on rigorous scientific information, best practices, close observation, monitoring and consultation.

Our role and mandate are clearly defined and supported at all levels of government as set forth by Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Act.

We work closely with the community and welcome opportunities to discuss our approach at forums like this.

As you've heard, the City of London has had drinking water fluoridation since 1967.

The decision to begin and continue this practice was based on scientific knowledge.

Then as now, there were people who opposed fluoridation – not just here but across Canada and in other countries.

Ongoing concerns have led several countries to review the practice by establishing expert scientific panels.

Over the past 10 years, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and most recently Canada have conducted comprehensive reviews.

In each case, the recommendations from these reviews consistently support adding fluoride to drinking water to prevent tooth decay.

Further, today, more than 90 national and international professional and health organizations support the practice.

They include Health Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Medical Association, The US Centers for Disease Control, the US National Institutes for Health and the World Health Organization.

And locally, on February 17th, of last year, the Middlesex London Board of Health passed a resolution supporting the continuation of drinking water fluoridation in London.

Despite the comprehensiveness of the scientific reviews, and the endorsements by health professional groups and international health organizations, I expect that you'll hear this evening from people who will raise doubt and anxiety about the safety of drinking water fluoridation.

To believe that scientists, medical experts and the health care system are in collusion to harm rather than help people on such a massive scale, defies any sense of reason.

Having not had success at the scientific level, those who oppose fluoridation are bringing this issue to the political level, in this case, the local political level, in the hopes of achieving a decision in their favour.

In other words, the issue of drinking water fluoridation which is before you tonight, is really a discussion about public policy. In this case, the continuation of a healthy public policy.

Recent examples of London City Council healthy public policies include:

- the smoking bylaws;
- the pesticide bylaw; and
- the bylaw requiring posting signs of restaurant inspections.

The examples I just gave are policies which were passed to enhance the health of the people of London.

So too was the intent of the City Council bylaw to add fluoride to London's drinking water in the 1960's.

If fluoride is removed from drinking water, it will have the opposite effect – it will result in harm to the dental health of Londoners.

I believe it's important to continue drinking water fluoridation for the following public policy reasons:

- Scientific evidence demonstrates it's a safe, effective measure that has resulted in a marked decline in the rates of tooth decay.

- Drinking water fluoridation provides a benefit for everyone in London regardless of age, education or economic circumstances.
- Tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease. It's five times more prevalent than asthma and seven times more common than hayfever.
- In tough economic times, fewer people have access to dental insurance coverage.
- We know that when faced with limited funds, adults go without basic dental care.
- Left untreated, tooth decay can lead to pain and suffering, infection in the mouth and infection in other parts of the body.
- For every dollar invested in community water fluoridation, we save an estimated \$38 in costs for dental treatment.

Given London's economic climate, to discontinue this important healthy public policy would further compromise those who are most vulnerable in our community, many of whom are children.

As you listen to tonight's presentations and discussion, it's important to remember that from a scientific perspective, drinking water fluoridation has been thoroughly reviewed and supported nationally and internationally.

Once again as members of City Council, you are put in the difficult position of making a decision about the best interests of the public's health while considering competing arguments.

As Medical Officer of Health, I urge you to support the continuation of this safe, effective, long established, healthy public policy.