Egg Harbor City considers turning off fluoride

By MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST, Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, February 20, 2015 9:30 am

EGG HARBOR CITY — Water fluoridation has been called one of the 20th century’s greatest public health achievements for preventing cavities in children’s developing teeth, but it never had been embraced in New Jersey.

Now, one of two water systems in the region that fluoridate water may drop it.

Egg Harbor City Council will hold a special meeting March 5 to talk about ending water fluoridation, spurred by a request from Water and Sewer Department Superintendent Jerry Gleason.

Gleason said most city water is used for washing and showering, cleaning clothes, flushing toilets and for outdoor use.

**Ending fluoridation 100% EHC waterworks boss’ idea**

EGG HARBOR CITY — Jerry Gleason has run the city’s water and sewer department more than 23 years, and said the idea to stop fluoridating city water is 100 percent his idea.

“We fluoridate all of the water,” Gleason said. “If people are drinking 2 percent to 3 percent of it, that means at least 97 percent is going to waste.”

Giving up the addition of fluoride will not save much money. The city spent $2,872 on the chemical last year in the form of hydrofluorosilicic acid, he said.

If the city ends the practice, it will leave the Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority as the only community water system to fluoridate in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland or southern Ocean counties.

Councilwoman Hazel Mueller said fluoridation has not been a controversy in town.

“It’s never been talked about, never,” she said, “I don’t think most people even realize it’s in the water.”

She encouraged people to research the issue and come to the meeting to voice their opinions.
Dentist Erik Mendelsohn, of Serenity Smile Design in Egg Harbor Township, has been practicing in the area 10 years. He is a believer in the benefits of systemic fluoride for children, through water fluoridation or vitamins.

“My daughter is getting oral fluoride in a dropper, because we don’t have (fluoridated water) in Margate,” he said of Amara, 10 months old. “I wouldn’t give it to her if I didn’t think it was beneficial.”

But Mueller said she personally would like to see it go.

“In the long run, we eat way better today and take better care of our teeth. This is going through the whole body just to help the teeth,” she said. “I think less chemicals in the body is better.”

If it was as effective as some in the medical community say in reducing cavities, all water systems would use it, she said. But, she said, if residents want to keep it, that’s what the city will do.

**Egg Harbor City to open $7 million water treatment plant in February**

EGG HARBOR CITY — The city’s new $7 million water treatment plant should be operational in early February, officials and workers said Friday at the plant’s dedication.

Fluoridation is not required in New Jersey, and just 14.6 percent of residents who get their water from community water systems have fluoridated drinking water, according to a 2012 CDC report. New Jersey has the second-lowest rate of fluoridation in the United States. Only Hawaii’s is lower.

More than 85 percent of New Jersey residents get their water from community water systems, such as municipalities or private companies, according to the DEP. Fewer than 15 percent have private wells.

An attempt to mandate fluoridation failed in the state Legislature last session. The New Jersey Public Water Supply Fluoridation Act was introduced again in January 2014 in the state Senate as S1180 but has stalled.

Most states with fluoridation rates for community water systems above 90 percent are in the Midwest. Closer to home in that category are Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and South Carolina.

The New Jersey Dental Association, the American Dental Association, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and many other medical groups strongly recommend adding fluoride to the water supply, to bring it to optimal levels. Fluoride occurs naturally in water throughout the United States, but in most places it’s not in high enough concentrations to protect teeth.
When the proper amount of fluoride is ingested, it permanently strengthens children’s developing primary and permanent teeth, and helps prevent tooth decay, according to the CDC. On its website, it calls fluoridation of water, which started about 65 years ago, “one of 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.”

According to the ADA, many studies show children who grow up in communities with fluoridated water supplies have fewer cavities than children who do not.

“A lot of kids may not brush their teeth that often,” Mendelsohn said. “So having it in the water has two benefits. While the teeth are developing, it helps form stronger enamel. Once enamel is formed, the fluoride in the water touching the teeth will counteract the acid of decay.”

But groups such as the Fluoride Action Network oppose fluoridation. The group calls fluoridation outdated and unsafe, and says there is little evidence it significantly improves dental health. The group cites the danger of dental fluorosis, or discoloring of teeth from ingesting too much fluoride; problems kidney patients can develop with bone health; and other medical problems the chemical may cause.

The New Jersey Department of Health does not have data on dental health outcomes for the state’s fluoridated vs. nonfluoridated communities, said spokeswoman Dawn Thomas. New Jersey does not participate in the CDC’s National Oral Health Surveillance System, which would allow a comparison to other states.

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IF YOU GO

What: Egg Harbor City Council discussion of ending fluoridation of city water

When: 7 p.m. March 5

Where: Egg Harbor City Municipal Building, 500 London Ave., Egg Harbor City

To learn more

For a list of all communities in the state that fluoridate, visit nj.gov/dep/watersupply/pdf/fluoride_pws.pdf