

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD – 11 March 2024

Question 1

Ann Russell, Hereford

Do Herefordshire Council have any plans to add fluoride to the public water supply? I am concerned about recent evidence linking fluoride exposure, even at low levels, to potential neurodevelopmental harm, especially during pregnancy and early childhood. A current federal trial in the US is shedding light on these health risks and the lack of informed consent regarding water fluoridation. Given the lack of evidence supporting its dental health benefits, I strongly urge Herefordshire Council to thoroughly consider these emerging health concerns before proceeding with any plans to add fluoride to the water supply. It is vital that the council refrains from subjecting residents to unnecessary health risks without their informed consent. Additionally, it is worth noting that fluoridation is often seen as a method of disposing of hazardous industrial waste.

Response

Thank you for your question.

The standard of children's oral health in Herefordshire is poorer than both the regional and national average with over a third (38%) of 5-year olds experiencing preventable tooth decay in 2021/22.

Work to address poor oral health in Herefordshire is overseen by the Oral Health Improvement board which involves a comprehensive action plan working with a wide range of partners to tackle the causes of poor oral health. This includes a specific action around fluoridation in water.

There have been multiple evidence reviews from around the world that have consistently found that levels of tooth decay are lower in fluoridated areas and that there is no credible scientific evidence that at permitted levels of water fluoridation is harmful to health.

Following legislative changes in 2022/23 the powers and responsibility to expand community water fluoridation schemes now sit with the Secretary of State through the Health and Care Act 2022 and associated regulations. Subsequently, central Government has responsibility for new schemes including expansion of existing arrangements and identification of funding. Should Herefordshire Health and Wellbeing Board decide to pursue fluoridation in water, a full public consultation of the local population is an early requirement of feasibility considerations.