September 20, 2000

TO: MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH

Dear Doctor:

RE: Fluoride Levels in Drinking Water

As you may know, Health Canada has adopted a revised Canadian Drinking Water Guideline for fluoride in drinking water. The guideline stipulates a Maximum Acceptable Concentration (MAC) of 1.5 mg/L. The impetus for this MAC is the growing evidence that, in addition to municipal water supplies, consumers are subject to fluoride intake from a variety of food products, as well as dental products such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, fluoride supplements and professionally applied dental gels and varnishes. The MAC is intended to ensure that when fluoride is added to drinking water, the concentration is such that the population receives the optimal benefit in the prevention of dental caries but does not develop dental or skeletal fluorosis. It should be noted that many government and health related agencies such as Health Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the World Health Association continue to endorse fluoridation of drinking water as an effective tool for the prevention of tooth decay.

Today, the Ontario Ministry of Environment posted a decision notice to reaffirm the MAC and recommended that the level of fluoride in water supplies, where fluoride is added, shall be in the range from 0.5 to 0.8 mg/L (Ontario Drinking Water Standard - ODWS). This notice is available on the Ontario Government's website at "http://204.40.253.254/envregistry/012023ep.htm". The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guideline's Monitoring the Fluoridation of Local Municipal or Regional Water Supply Protocol has been amended to reflect the above-mentioned changes. A copy is attached for your reference.

However, there are a number of areas in Ontario where the naturally occurring fluoride level in drinking water is greater than 1.5 mg/L. In those areas, it is recommended that strategies be developed to ensure that dental or skeletal fluorosis do not occur and to avoid the costly installation of defluoridation equipment.

The Public Health Branch, of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, recommends an approach to raise public awareness and education to control excessive exposure where naturally occurring fluoride levels in drinking water are routinely in excess of 1.5 mg/L. Since any adverse effects of fluoride levels below 2.4 mg/L are likely to be cosmetic in nature, the educational approach should be one which effectively controls exposure without compromising the individual's health status. The advice given may include the following:

- Use non-fluoridated toothpaste or no toothpaste for young children. Where fluoridated toothpaste is used, ensure that children use no more than a pea-sized amount on the
toothbrush and teach them not to swallow the toothpaste. It is recommended that children under six years of age be supervised while brushing. Children under the age of three should have their teeth brushed by an adult without using any toothpaste.

- Do not use mouthwash or mouth rinses to which fluoride has been added (check label for conformation).

- Do not use fluoride supplements unless advised to do so by your dentist.

- Consider using non-fluoridated, bottled water for drinking, cooking and mixing frozen fruit juices.

- Where baby formula is used, non-fluoridated water should be used for mixing.

- Have your well water analyzed to determine the fluoride level.

- Consult your local Health Unit or family dentist for more information.

cc  Child Health Program Managers
    Dental Directors
    Public Health Inspectors
    Goff Jenkins, MOE