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# Knesset Approves Mandatory Fluoridation of Drinking Water

The Water Authority opposes this move, claiming that this is coercion of individual citizens, with the health benefits of fluoridation still a controversial matter.

Jonathan Lis and Zafir Rinat | Mar 17, 2016 3:40 AM

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Health Minister Yaakov Litzman. Credit: Tali Meyer

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The Knesset's Interior and Environment Committee has approved the restoration of mandatory fluoridation of drinking water, aimed at prevention of dental plaque. Several MKs appealed the decision and a repeat vote is expected to be held, although the chances of a



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reversal of the first vote are slim.

If the decision stands after a second vote, water fluoridation will be reinstated with no further voting. The Water Authority is vehemently opposed to this move, initiated by Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, claiming that this is coercion of individual citizens, with the health benefits of fluoridation still a controversial matter.

The debate that was held yesterday morning was attended by former Health Minister Yael German, who suspended water fluoridation. In response to the committee's decision, she said that "as a state we can't compel everyone to receive fluoride through drinking water, just as we can't force everyone to get immunized. Restoring fluoridation by coercion is a forcible move that is contrary to human freedom and dignity. Except for Ireland there is no other country that mandates the introduction of fluoride into its drinking water." German was one of the MKs who appealed the decision. The new debate is expected to take place next week.

The debate was also attended by MK Zouheir Bahloul (Zionist Camp), who supported restoring fluoridation. After the debate he said that "there's no doubt that this is a complex and confusing topic with many conflicting opinions. However, knowing that we'll succeed even partially in assisting weaker sectors of society, I believe that restoring fluoridation and reducing dental plaque should be supported."

The fierce opposition of the Water Authority to this move was expressed in a legal brief written and submitted to the Health Ministry a few months ago by the authority's legal counsel, attorney Hannah Frankel. According to this document, which was obtained by Haaretz, fluoridation of drinking water constitutes coercion of individual citizens, whereas the health benefits are still in dispute. This treatment, says the document, will detract from the public's confidence in the water it receives.

According to the Health Ministry, based on research conducted by Harold Sgan-Cohen, a professor of community dentistry from Hadassah Hospital, it turns out that adding fluoride reduces plaque by 29 percent in 12-year-old children. Fluoridation also reduces gaps in dental health between different socioeconomic groups, as observed in cities that employed fluoridation in contrast to those that didn't. These data led the ministry to believe that restoring mandatory fluoridation was justified.



**Jonathan Lis**

Haaretz Correspondent



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