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WATER WOES: NJ DIVIDED OVER BENEFITS OF FLUORIDATED WATER

Fairleigh Dickinson University, August 9, 2018 – New Jersey’s public drinking water [ranks among the lowest](#) in the country when it comes to fluoridation, and based on public attitudes, a sizable number of Garden State residents believe this is a good thing. The most recent statewide survey from the Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll finds that a third (34%) say that adding fluoride to water does more harm than good. Forty-eight percent believe otherwise, and say that adding fluoride to water is a good thing.

“There have been multiple attempts to require fluoridation in New Jersey over the past few years, and they’ve all failed,” said Dan Cassino, professor of political science and an FDU Poll analyst. “But if the public is this skeptical about the benefits of fluoridation, it’s easy to see why it hasn’t happened.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, only 14.6 percent of New Jersey residents currently live in areas where fluoride is added to the water to bring the level of fluoride up to those recommended by the CDC. Overall, 67 percent of Americans receive fluoridated water: only Hawaii has a lower percent of residents receiving fluoride than New Jersey, at 11.7 percent. Neighboring states are much closer to the national average: 71 percent of New Yorkers drink fluoridated water, along with 55 percent of Pennsylvanians and 87 percent of Delaware residents.

New Jerseyans are now less likely to receive fluoridated water than in the past: as recently as [2006](#), the CDC said that 22.6 percent of New Jersey residents had access to fluoridated, a figure more than 50 percent higher than the current rate of 14.6 percent.

In general, Democrats (54%) are more likely to think that adding fluoride to water is a good idea than Republicans (46%) or political independents (42%). College educated New Jerseyans are also more likely to support adding fluoride: 54 percent of those with a college education support adding fluoride, compared with 42 percent who didn’t graduate from college.

Those who believe more harm than good comes from fluoridated water are not alone as anti-fluoride activists have proliferated in the online age. Among their claims are those regarding a purported link between fluoride and reduced intelligence, and a belief that adding fluoride to water amounts to involuntary medication of the populace, making it unethical, regardless of any health benefits.

In contrast, the CDC calls community water fluoridation one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20th century, and notes that the only proven negative health effect of fluoridation is damage to tooth enamel that can result from overly high levels of fluoride in water.

Recently, the [Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll](#) found that nationwide, 43 percent believe fluoridated public drinking water is simply a way for chemical companies to offload dangerous toxins into the environment. This makes concerns about fluoridation more common nationwide than beliefs that radiation from cellular phones is harmful (34 percent say that it is), and much more common than the belief that childhood vaccines cause autism, which is endorsed by only 16 percent of Americans.

“The addition of fluoride to water is considered one of the top ten greatest public health achievements in the 20th century,” said Dr. Marnie Sperling, a dentist and Clinical Assistant Professor of Nursing at Fairleigh Dickinson University. “This important statistic from the Centers for Disease Control should give anyone pause who finds themselves agreeing with those who argue against fluoridated drinking water.”

Interestingly, the same survey asked questions about trust in local and state government and finds that those who trust government the least are also the least likely to believe in the benefits of fluoridated drinking water. For example, among those who say they never trust local and state government to do what is right, 40 percent believe the addition of fluoride is a good thing, as compared with 52 percent of those who express at least some trust in state and local government to do what is right. Similarly, 42 percent of those who never trust local government oppose fluoridation, compared with 32 percent of those who trust the government “some” of the time.

“We think of trust in government as this very nebulous concept,” said Cassino. “But in the case of water, the product of a government agency is literally coming into your house and even your body, so it’s no surprise that people who don’t trust the government generally don’t trust anything it might do to the water.”

Methodology - The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone May 16-May 21, 2018 using a random sample of adults in New Jersey aged 18 and older (N = 926). Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.5 percentage points, including the design effect.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

Interviews are conducted by Key Research Solutions of Provo, Utah, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, sex, and race. 372 interviews were conducted on landlines and 554 were conducted on cellular telephones.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll received an “A” rating from statistician Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight blog. The ratings measure both accuracy and bias for all major polling services in the United States, providing an update to similar research the poll watchers conducted in 2014. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll’s “A” rating puts it in the top 14 of the more than 380 polling institutes reviewed and graded from A+ through F. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was found to have a 94 percent accuracy rate for predicting election results, and is one of only two A-rated polling institutes with zero bias to their rankings.

Tables

<i>When you drink water at home, do you drink it straight from the tap with no filtration system, is it filtered, or do you buy bottled water?</i>									
		PID			Trust in Govt			Education	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	All of the Time	Some of the Time	Never	HS/Some college	College+
Tap	18%	18%	14%	22%	20%	19%	15%	19%	18%
Filtered	32%	32%	36%	31%	24%	34%	30%	28%	35%
Bottled	35%	36%	33%	33%	31%	34%	39%	43%	29%
Combo [vol]	14%	13%	15%	15%	26%	13%	15%	10%	17%
DK (vol)	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Ref. (vol)	0%		1%		0%	0%	0%		0%

<i>In general, how often do you trust state and local government to do what is best for you?</i>						
		PID			Education	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	HS/Some college	College+
All of the Time	6%	6%	2%	7%	7%	4%
Some of the Time	68%	76%	67%	58%	59%	75%
Never	25%	18%	31%	34%	34%	21%
DK (vol)	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Ref. (vol)	0%			1%	0%	0%

Now I'd like to ask you about drinking water in New Jersey. Which of the following statements best describes what you believe?									
		PID			Trust in Govt			Education	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	All of the Time	Some of the Time	Never	HS/Some college	College+
Adding Fluoride Good	48%	54%	41%	45%	46%	52%	40%	42%	54%
Fluoride Brings more Harm than Good	35%	31%	40%	38%	38%	32%	42%	41%	30%
DK (vol)	16%	15%	17%	17%	16%	16%	18%	17%	16%
Ref. (vol)	1%	0%	2%	0%		1%	1%	0%	1%

Exact question wording and order

US1 and US2 withheld

NJ1 though NJ3 released June 6, 2018

W1A *In general, how often do you trust state and local government to do what is best for you?*

- 1 All of the time
- 2 Some of the time
- 3 Never
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

W2 *Now I'd like to ask you about drinking water in New Jersey. Which of the following statements best describes what you believe: Adding fluoride to drinking water is good because it promotes dental health and brings no negative health effects OR The addition of fluoride to drinking water may do more harm than good.*

- 1 Adding fluoride good
- 2 Fluoride brings more harm than good
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

W3 *When you drink water at home, do you drink it straight from the tap with no filtration system, is it filtered, or do you buy bottled water?*

- 1 Straight from the tap no filter
- 2 Filtered
- 3 Bottled
- 4 Combo (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Weighted sample characteristics

Male	49%
Female	51%
Democrat (with leaners)	48%
Republican (with leaners)	31%
Independent	16%
18-34	28%
35-59	35%
60+	35%
White	64%
African-American	11%
Latino	15%
Asian	7%
Other/refused	4%