HOW TO

When Community Water Fluoridation Becomes an Urgent Local Issue

MICHIGAN Oral Health Coalition

A 'How To' Guide

Navigating Urgent, Local CWF Issues

When news surfaces that a local board, council, or water authority is considering changes to Community Water Fluoridation (CWF), the situation can evolve rapidly. This guide provides a quick, actionable framework for community members and local partners to understand the issue, identify key contacts, and effectively participate in the local decision-making process.

Your timely and informed engagement is crucial. Use the following steps to ensure your voice is heard and considered.



Initial Steps:
Verify, Alert, Understand

1. Verify the Situation

Begin by finding official documents or contacting key individuals to confirm critical details:

- What specific action is under consideration? Is it a discussion, a proposal, or an impending vote?
- Who holds the decision-making power? Identify the governing body and the specific water system involved.
- When is the next meeting, and is CWF on the agenda for discussion or action?
- How can the public participate? Clarify rules for public comments, sign-up requirements, written submission deadlines, and remote participation options.
- Identify local contacts: the board/council clerk, water-system contact, and local health department.

Always save direct links to agendas and the exact wording of any CWF-related items. If information remains unclear, transparently communicate these uncertainties to your partners.

2. Alert State and Coalition Partners

Share verified information promptly with your state and coalition partners. Include the agenda, decision-making body, meeting date, anticipated action, and any known questions or concerns.

- **Sandy Sutton, MDHHS Oral Health Program:** Provide current evidence and request state-level information relevant to the issues raised.
- **Kimberly Raleigh, Michigan Oral Health Coalition:** Leverage MOHC for communications support, toolkit materials, and broader response coordination.

If a meeting or vote is imminent, highlight the date and any submission deadlines at the beginning of your message. You can start local outreach while awaiting their detailed response.

3. Understand the Discussion's Drivers

Seek to understand the board's specific questions and any staff reports or proposals. Determine if concerns primarily revolve around health and safety, cost and operations, or both. Pinpoint whether they are inquiring about a particular study, a water-system expense, equipment needs, or current fluoride levels.

This understanding enables partners to provide targeted and relevant information. Avoid assuming all board members share the same concerns, and don't delay contact while trying to gather every single data point.

Initial Steps:
Engage, Prepare & Follow Up

4. Connect with Local Voices

Start with the local health department and people who serve the community, including dental and medical professionals, schools, and other community organizations. Tell them what is confirmed, share the agenda and participation instructions, and ask whether they would like to learn more or offer their perspective.

Useful questions include:

- Who works with families affected by limited access to dental care?
- Are there local oral-health data or firsthand experiences that can responsibly inform the discussion?
- Are schools interested in sharing a perspective? If relevant, do they have water-bottle filling stations, and which water supply serves them?

Ask people to speak in their own voice. Offer a template as a starting point, not a script they must sign.

5. Prepare for the Meeting

Use the Town Hall & Community Meeting FAQ to check how to participate and the Public Speaking & Media Guidance to draft a short comment. A useful comment introduces your connection to the community, identifies the concern, explains why the decision matters, and makes one specific request.

For example: *"My name is [name], and I live/work in [community]. I care about preventing tooth decay and making sure this decision is informed by current evidence and local conditions. I ask the board to hear from public health and water-system experts and allow time for community input before deciding whether to change fluoridation."*

For written outreach, adapt the **Written Advocacy Communication Templates**. For questions raised in conversation, consult **Tools for Community Discussion and Engagement** and check current technical information with the appropriate experts. If you do not know the answer to a technical or operational question, record it and connect the board with someone qualified to answer it.

6. Follow Up After the Meeting

Confirm what happened: Was a decision made, delayed, or referred for more information? Note any next meeting, vote, requested materials, and public-comment deadline. Share a short, accurate update with the people you contacted and with MOHC and MDHHS partners. Send any promised information, and keep the agenda, minutes, and correspondence together for the next step.

If the timeline is very short: Verify the agenda and decision-maker; alert MOHC and MDHHS with the meeting date; check how to submit comments; then contact local partners. Additional data can follow.



Crafting a Timely Outreach Email

When faced with time-sensitive discussions regarding community water fluoridation, a clear and concise email is essential for quickly mobilizing partners and local stakeholders. This template ensures all critical information is conveyed efficiently, prompting informed action and collaboration.

> **Subject:** Time-sensitive: fluoridation discussion in [community] on [date]
>
> Hello [name],
>
> I'm reaching out because [board/water authority] is [confirmed action or discussion] concerning community water fluoridation at its [date/time] meeting. The agenda is here: [link]. [A vote is expected / I am still confirming whether a vote is expected]. The deadline for written comments is [date/time, if known].
>
> The questions raised so far appear to concern [health / cost / operations / unknown]. I'm contacting you to share the meeting information and ask whether you have relevant information or would like to participate. Please let me know if there are local considerations or contacts we should be aware of.
>
> Thank you,
> [Name and contact information]

Key considerations when using this template:

- Always verify all details (**board, date, time, action, agenda link, vote expectation, comment deadline**) before sending to ensure accuracy.
- Tailor the section on **questions raised** to reflect the specific concerns driving the discussion, if known.
- Clearly state the **purpose** of your email: to share information and solicit input or participation.
- Encourage recipients to provide **local context or contacts** that could be valuable for the response effort.
- Send this email as soon as the relevant information is confirmed to maximize response time.