



RFK Jr. wants to remove fluoride from water. It's already not in Worcester's water.

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald Trump's [pick to run the Department of Health and Human Services](#), has gone on the record in support of removing fluoride from the country's drinking water.

But in multiple cities and towns in Massachusetts, including Worcester and Springfield, there's already no fluoride.

[Records](#) from the state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services show that only 360 Worcester homes get fluoridated water. Of those 360 homes, half of them receive water from the town of Holden.

In comparison, Boston, Massachusetts' largest city, is fully fluoridated.

Worcester tried to fluoridate its water several times through a ballot referendum, the most recent in 2001 — according to Amie Shei, president and chief executive officer at the [Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts](#).

Shei, who has a doctorate in health policies, told MassLive voters rejected the referendum that year and that by not having fluoride, some communities in Worcester are at risk of negative consequences for their oral health and their health in general.

She acknowledged, however, that despite this risk, Worcester residents seem to have little appetite to fluoridate the water. She cited misinformation and conspiracy theories as the reasons why people have voted against fluoridation in general.

"I think we see so much polarization in the broader environment these days and there's more social isolation," Shei said. "People tend to stay in their own networks, their own bubbles and so they aren't always hearing from a variety of sources."

Fluoride is a mineral that strengthens teeth and helps prevent cavities. In 1945, Grand Rapids, Michigan, became the first city in the United States to add fluoride to its drinking water, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website](#).

Adding fluoride to the city's drinking water was part of a 15-year trial to fight tooth decay. By 1949, dental experts reported a significantly lower number of cavities in Grand Rapids children starting school that year. That same year, cities and small towns in Michigan, Wisconsin and Texas began their own fluoridation programs. As years went by, more and more Americans began drinking water with fluoride in it, with half of the entire country's population receiving fluoridated water by 1980.

In a [post on X](#), Kennedy claimed that fluoride is an "industrial waste associated with arthritis, bone fractures, bone cancer, IQ loss, neuro-developmental disorders, and thyroid disease." He also said the Trump administration would advise all U.S. water systems to remove the mineral.

Shei told MassLive that these claims were not based on scientific facts and that research has shown fluoride to be safe. She also mentioned that fluoride can be found naturally in private wells, which she said are used by residents in Central Massachusetts.

"Moderation is key," Shei said. "If you take something in at a much higher level than what is recommend or what your body can absorb, there might be negative health impacts but what we're talking about in terms of fluoridation and community water supply is at a level that has been proven to be very safe and has many public health benefits."

As to whether Kennedy would successfully remove fluoride from the water supply from other towns and cities, Shei said she was unsure what explicit recommendations or policies he would make if he were to be confirmed as HHS secretary.

"I think it remains to be seen," Shei said. "So, it will be interesting to see if there's actually a mandate or if its guidance that his office issues for those communities that are already fluoridating their water supplies. So, I'm not sure, especially here in Massachusetts, how many local boards of health would reverse their position on this important health issue."