

## **Sortition Simulation: Learning Phase Handout**

### **The science and health communities tell you that:**

- Fluoride is found naturally in soil, water, and foods, and is produced synthetically for use in drinking water, toothpaste, and mouthwashes. The government will set the percentage of fluoride at a safe level after extensive research.
- Drinking fluoridated water is a very effective way of preventing tooth decay; it reduces cavities by about 25% in children and adults. Cavities are one of the most common health problems affecting children, but many children cannot afford the cost of regular dental checks and may have untreated cavities escalate into infections, which can cause illness or even death.
- But *too much* fluoride in childhood can lead to a condition called dental fluorosis, causing discoloration of teeth but no other health effects. Too much fluoride may also lead to skeletal fluorosis, which, over time, can cause pain and damage in bones and joints.
- There is some controversial evidence that fluoride is a developmental neurotoxin which can hurt the IQ of children who were exposed to it during pregnancy.
- Public fluoridation is supported by nearly all UK-based public health, medical, and dental organizations, as well as the World Health Organization.

### **The economists tell you that:**

- For every dollar spent on public fluoridation, \$38 is saved in health care costs.

### **The polls on public opinion tell you that, of the UK population,**

- 20% strongly support public fluoridation
- 42% support public fluoridation
- 20% oppose public fluoridation
- 18% strongly oppose public fluoridation

### **Public comments reveal that supporters commonly cite the following reasons in support:**

- It's equitable. Low-income communities and communities of color are more vulnerable to tooth decay because of factors such as unequal access to dental care.
- It's a good investment. It will save our healthcare system (which, in the UK, is public) a lot of money on a pervasive but preventable issue. We can re-invest these funds elsewhere.
- It's not fair for individuals who won't take better care of their teeth to impose costs on the rest of us. This helps to prevent these costs without requiring anyone to change their behavior.

### **Public comments reveal that opponents commonly cite the following reasons against:**

- The government should not be in the business of determining what's good for our health and forcefully imposing it on everyone. Once the whole water supply's fluoridated, even those who are opposed to fluoridation will be affected by it. My body, my choice.
- Low-income communities will be disproportionately impacted. They, unlike the wealthy, can't afford fluoride-free sources of water (e.g., bottled water) if they are skeptical about fluoride.
- Fluoridation made sense historically, when there weren't many alternative ways to prevent tooth decay. Now, we get fluoride from our toothpaste and fluoride treatments at the dentist. Adding it to our drinking water has become unnecessary and raises risks of fluorosis.