



Supporting the Mandatory Fortification of Flour with Folic Acid

A consensus statement in response to the UK Government consultation.

9 September 2019

Introducing the mandatory fortification of flour and other non-wheat products with folic acid is an important public health measure. Over 80 countries around the world already benefit from mandatory fortification and higher intake of folic acid among their population. This helps to prevent neural tube defects and instances of spina bifida, anencephaly and encephalocele, and provides other health benefits.

The National Diet and Nutritional Survey UK 2017 indicates that among women of childbearing age, 75% of participants had a red blood cell folate concentration lower than the threshold for optimal avoidance of folate-sensitive fetal neural tube defects. Mean red blood cell folate was significantly lower for women aged 16 to 24 years than for those aged 35 to 49 years; this figure increases in the most socio-economically deprived areas. Peri-conceptual folic acid supplement use has not been adopted by most women, a concern made more urgent by the high rate of unintended pregnancies in the UK each year.

As organisations we represent the UK and Ireland’s medical, nursing and midwifery royal colleges, doctors and medical students, dietitians and people living with spina bifida and hydrocephalus. It has been decades since the benefits of introducing mandatory fortification have been known and the delay in introducing this measure has led to stillbirths, neonatal deaths, disability and avoidable terminations of pregnancy.

Together, our organisations support the mandatory fortification of all flour and other non-wheat products, such as gluten free, with folic acid. This would ensure that we maximise the benefits of higher folic acid intake and reduce the occurrence of preventable defects during pregnancy.

We urge the government to implement this measure without delay.

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