

A call for global action to reduce the prevalence of Neural Tube Defects worldwide



The International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF) is calling for urgent action demanding universal mandatory food fortification with vitamin B9

(folic acid) to reduce the risk of Spina Bifida, Anencephaly, or Encephalocele, also called Neural Tube Defects (NTDs).

Vitamin B9 is a micronutrient. Food fortification is a process where micronutrients are added to commonly consumed foods to improve nutritional quality.

Decades of evidence have demonstrated that mandatory fortification of staple foods with Vitamin B9 is the most effective and cost-efficient method to reduce the prevalence of NTDs.

Maternal intake of vitamin B9 before and during pregnancy reduces the risks of NTDs because vitamin B9 is essential for a healthy periconceptional period, being the 14 weeks before and 10 weeks after conception.

IF calls on all relevant stakeholders to support a global action that includes the following recommendations:

- 1 To **develop and implement mandatory fortification programs** of vitamin B9 in staple foods for the prevention of NTDs
- 2 To make mandatory fortification of staple foods with vitamin B9 **a global priority**
- 3 To **raise awareness of NTDs, combat stigma** associated with them and of **effective rights-based prevention strategies** which respect the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities among all relevant stakeholders including government officials, health professionals, civil society and the public
- 4 To ensure that mandatory fortification programs **adhere to international standards and guidelines**
- 5 To **promote and strengthen primary prevention of NTDs** through food fortification by involving all relevant actors. In particular, ensuring that the development of the policies are done **in accordance with article 4(3) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** by consulting persons with disabilities, including persons with NTDs, and their representative organisations in the development of policies relevant to them, including policies for the primary prevention of NTDs

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