

Chief Health Officer Advisory

1 September 2015

Status: Active

Folic acid fortification issues

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Date issued:	1 September 2015
Issued by:	Professor Michael Ackland, Acting Chief Health Officer, Victoria
Issued to:	General practitioners, maternal and child health nurses.

Key messages

- There is a global supply shortage of folic acid used to fortify wheat flour used for bread making.
- Due to the shortage, bread products normally fortified may not consistently include folic acid until mid-2016.
- Pregnant women (including one month before conception) are recommended to have a daily dose of folic acid of at least 0.4mg daily to aid in the prevention of neural tube defects.

What is the issue?

- Folic acid fortification of wheat flour for bread making was introduced to reduce neural tube defects by helping women enter pregnancy with improved dietary exposure to folate.
- There is a global supply shortage of folic acid, which is required for fortifying wheat flour used for making bread.
- Due to this shortage, wheat flour used in bread products may not consistently include folic acid even where the labelling may indicate folate fortification.
- There is no threat to folic acid supplies for the supplement industry.
- Folic acid in bread provides a 'safety net' level of folic acid for women. Women planning a pregnancy should follow the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommendations and continue to take a daily folic acid supplement at least one month before, and three months after conception. This is in addition to eating a healthy and varied diet as recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Who is at risk?

Pregnant women (including one month before conception) are recommended to have a daily dose of folic acid of at least 0.4mg to aid in the prevention of neural tube defects.

Prevention/treatment

The target population of women aged 16-44 years is also encouraged to consume other food sources of folate which include dark green vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, citrus fruit, legumes such as lentils and peas, and whole grains.

Pregnant women (including one month before conception) are recommended a dose of folic acid at least 0.4mg daily to aid in the prevention of neural tube defects.

More information

Health professionals

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists - Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation and Pregnancy <https://www.ranzcog.edu.au/doc/vitamin-and-mineral-supplementation-in-pregnancy.html>

Consumer information

Better Health Channel - Folate for women

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Folate_for_women

Food Standards Australia New Zealand - Folic acid/folate and pregnancy

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/generalissues/pregnancy/folic/Pages/default.aspx>

Yours sincerely



Professor Michael Ackland

Acting Chief Health Officer

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