



Folate in bread welcomed as proven, cheap, safe and effective

The President of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) today welcomed the advent of folate in the Australian bread supply as a proven, cheap, safe and effective way of preventing distressing birth defects such as spina bifida.

As of today, bread-making flour must contain minute amounts of folic acid, a form of the B vitamin folate, which occurs naturally in some fruits and vegetables, and is already added by manufacturers to a number of food products.

PHAA President Professor Mike Daube said, "This initiative will mean a significant reduction in the 350 neural tube defects (NTDs) in Australia each year. Mandatory folate fortification of bread has been introduced in many other countries – including the US and Canada, where it has been in place for over a decade. The jury is in - it is safe, cheap and effective."

"Much of the groundbreaking research on the benefits of folate was carried out by leading Australian researchers, Professors Carol Bower and Fiona Stanley. We know from their work that folate supplementation and education alone are not enough – especially as for maximum impact it needs to be taken before pregnancy, and around half of pregnancies are unplanned. We also know that this measure will bring especial benefits to disadvantaged communities."

"The introduction of mandatory folate fortification follows meticulous reviews of the evidence over many years by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and other food and health authorities. As with any new health initiative it will be important that all aspects of the process and its outcomes are carefully monitored and evaluated, and we are very pleased that the implementation program takes this into account. We can now anticipate a decline in NTDs and the heartache that accompanies them."

For further information/comment:

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