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Bhoireannach
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Minister for Public Health and Women's Health
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Clare Haughey MSP
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20 December 2024

Dear Convener

The Bread and Flour Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2024

(The Amendment of the Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 and the implementation of the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid)

As you are aware, Scottish Ministers have long advocated for the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid to help prevent foetal neural tube defects (NTDs), such as spina bifida. There is strong evidence that many NTDs can be prevented by women increasing their intake of folic acid, prior to conception and until the 12th week of pregnancy.

I am pleased to update that legislation has been laid today for the fortification of non-wholemeal wheat flour with folic acid. There are around 1,000 NTD affected pregnancies each year in the UK. The new requirements will help to prevent around 200 babies being born with life-changing brain and spinal conditions.

Flour is already fortified with calcium, thiamin, niacin and iron for public health reasons. The addition of folic acid is a significant step in our efforts to improve public health outcomes for women and their babies.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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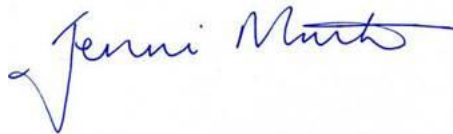
Existing advice is for women trying to conceive or newly pregnant to take a daily 400 microgram supplement of folic acid prior to and up until the 12th week of pregnancy. This advice will continue as fortification is intended to supplement, not replace that advice. It is there to help, particularly with unplanned pregnancies where a woman may not find out she is pregnant until well into the crucial window when the neural tube is forming.

Reducing the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy and increasing preparation for pregnancy, through preventative actions such as folic acid supplementation, is an area that the Scottish Government is separately focussing on as part of our collective efforts to improve [early child development](#). As part of that work, we have developed content and combined advice for individuals [planning a pregnancy](#) on NHS Inform, which launched in late 2023.

The development of the UK wide policy to fortify flour with folic acid has been a close collaboration with Food Standards Scotland, as well as the UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland. Legislation has been laid in England and Northern Ireland, and Wales also intend to lay similar legislation soon. There will be a transition period for industry to implement the changes, with the legislation due to come into effect across all four nations by end December 2026.

Food Standards Scotland and the Scottish Government will continue to engage with industry during the transition period to support them to make the required changes.

Yours sincerely,



Jenni Minto MSP

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