

The Nation

Teaspoon iodine prevents brain damage

In Pakistan some 2.25 million babies are born each year with intellectual impairment caused by iodine deficiency in women during pregnancy. On clinical examinations about 7 per cent of school going children between the ages of 6 -12 revealed having either palpable or visible goitres.

Nutrition Officer UNICEF, Dr Syed Qadir, at an advocacy seminar on iodised salt usage held Friday said, "Evidence from the various studies tells us that an inadequate supply of iodine during pregnancy results in damage to the fetal brain that is irreversible." While explaining the effects of iodine deficiency on the health of newborns, Dr Azhar Khan, District Health Officer, Islamabad Capital Territory, said that iodine deficiency in children represented only tip of the iceberg.

He said, "Most children born to iodine-deficient mothers appear normal but have also suffered brain damage and loss in IQ points, affecting their ability to develop to their full potential," adding that those seemingly normal children would later have difficulty in learning and staying at school. He agreed that doctors in the community were attentive more to curative aspect than to preventive and this reason was leading to major issues. He emphasised that the message of iodised salt consumption should be prioritised and disseminated along with other health messages in ongoing campaigns.

Dr Khalid Iqbal, In-charge Rural Health Centrr Barakahu, said that all iodine deficiency disorders could be prevented with just one teaspoon of iodine consumed in tiny amounts on a regular basis over a lifetime at a very little cost. Universal salt iodisation was the most effective way to ensure that every child gets enough iodine. It was made clear that iodised salt was the cheapest way that could provide a high degree of protection against a range of iodine deficiency disorders. The seminar was organised jointly by The Network for Consumer Protection and District Health Department ICT with support of UNICEF. Health community including doctors, medical assistants, lady health supervisors, lady health visitors and lady health workers attended the seminar. The participants shared their concerns regarding iodised salt in the question and answer session after the briefing.