

Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Bill, 2009

Draft presented to cabinet for concurrence

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ISLAMABAD - To control the alarming Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) in Pakistan, which has become one of the most serious health hazards, the Ministry of Health has expedited the process of the Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Bill 2009.

According to an official of the Ministry, the draft Bill has been presented to the cabinet for concurrence, after which it would be submitted to the Law Division for vetting process.

"Earlier the cabinet had returned the Bill with assigning few objections and

now the amended draft Bill has been again tabled before the cabinet", the official added.

He said the Ministry of Health initiated the process a couple of years ago while recognizing the fact that the IDD is a major public health problem in the country". As Pakistan is rated 6th amongst the countries, where iodine deficiency has become a big threat to the health of children and pregnant women.

According to the official if the proposal was implemented then it would be must for every salt producer to mix required amount of iodine in every type of salt.

Pakistan produces enough

salt for human, animal and industrial use. More than 90 percent is rock salt. There are 1,172 salt processing units, 68 percent of them are small, managed by untrained personnel.

Iodine is needed by thyroid gland for healthy functioning. Lack of iodine can lead to goiter a swollen neck due to a swollen thyroid gland.

The condition leads to breathing and swallowing problems. Iodine deficiency can cause a range of problems, including miscarriages or stillbirths in pregnant women, while children who are born iodine-deficient often suffer impaired mental

development.

However, iodine deficiency is much less common in industrialised nations due to the addition of iodine to table salt. And the universal salt iodization is a programme that is implemented all over the world.

According to the independent statistics in Pakistan, around 50 million people are suffering from iodine deficiency, 6.5 million of which are facing severe type of deficiency and at least one million show some degree of mental retardation.

Up to 90 per cent population of hilly areas of NWFP, AJK and Northern Areas and numerous pockets of

population in Punjab is iodine deficient. Ironically, only 17 per cent of the overall population use iodised salt in our country.

Although the prevalence of iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) in the country is lower than in most South Asian countries, the problem is ubiquitous and affects millions of people.

Previous efforts to fortify oil with iodide had been met with limited success. The next simplest option was to fortify salt with iodine. However, previous examples where such a programme existed showed that a large portion of the population was still unreachable.