

TheNation

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Body to create public awareness of iodine salt benefits

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD - A body comprising of media persons was set up here on Tuesday in order to achieve the goal of elimination of Iodine deficiency (IDD), the most common and preventable cause of brain damage.

In this regard, The Network for Consumer Protection, a non-profit NGO, organised a consultative meeting with print and electronic media's journalists here at a local hotel. The said body of the journalists will represent all reputed media organisations across the country aimed at creating awareness among the key stake holders regarding the benefits of iodised salt to combat the iodine deficiency disorders among children and pregnant mothers.

Health experts threw light on the need and awareness regarding the usage of iodised salt. Dr Rizwan Taj, Head of Psychiatry at PIMS, discussed the reasons and repercussions of iodine deficiency.

He suggested that media can play decisive role in this regard by spreading correct information and awareness among the masses. Dr

Suleman Qazi and Dr Khawaja Masood also presented their findings at the occasion. They informed that according to the National Nutrition Survey 2001 documented that 17 per cent of iodised salt is utilised in our country.

Dr Arif Azad, Executive Coordinator of The Network for Consumer Protection, highlighting the objective of the media alliance, said that media could play a vital role in raising awareness of this critical public health issue and enhancing government commitment to the need of IDD's legislation.

Dr Azad said that Iodine deficiency disorders like mental retardation, Cretinism, goitre, dwarfism, still births and other mental and physical impairment can easily be prevented through the use of iodised salt.

Therefore, we should all consider it a crime to let a single child to be born mentally handicapped due to iodine deficiency, he pledged.

It is relevant to mention here that the Iodine Deficiency Project was a joint effort between the government of Pakistan, UNICEF and Population Services International

(PSI) in the early nineties to tackle the issue of iron deficiency. About 20 million people live in iodine-deficient areas of Pakistan. Of these, 8 million show some manifestation of iodine deficiency, and at least a million show some degree of mental retardation. In 1993, an estimated 70% of the population was at risk for iron deficiency.

Previous efforts to fortify oil with iodide had been met with limited success. The next simplest option was to fortify salt with iodine.

Dr Sadia Assad, Program Coordinator of The Network, threw light on impacts of iodine deficiencies. She noted that iodine deficiencies can cause a wide range of health issues throughout the reproductive life cycle of women including effects on babies in mother's womb, during prenatal and post natal complications on mothers and infant health. In the meeting it was discussed that media can highlight and identify cultural and political barriers to ensure quality, success, sustainability for universal salt iodisation. Mehnaz of The Network was the moderator at the seminar.