

Florida Folic Acid Coalition Position Statement on Folic Acid Recommendations

The Florida Folic Acid Coalition is a coalition of public, private and business organizations with the following mission and vision.

Mission: to decrease the incidence of folic acid preventable birth defects and to reduce chronic disease risk of Floridians.

To fulfill its mission, the Florida Folic Acid Coalition pursues the following goals:

- Increase the number of women who consume 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of synthetic folic acid daily, from fortified foods and/or supplements, in addition to food folate from a varied diet.
- Promote folic acid awareness as a routine and standard part of the delivery of preventive health care services provided to Floridians.
- Increase awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of folic acid across the lifespan.

Vision: As a result of the Coalition's efforts, the simple primary prevention strategy will result in fewer pregnancies affected by folic acid preventable birth defects. More Floridians will experience the indirect health benefits of taking a daily multivitamin (with folic acid) to enhance health throughout their lifespan.

Background

Neural tube defects (NTDs) are a group of common and severe birth defects that affect approximately 3,000 babies born each year in the U.S. Among these defects are the disabling conditions of spina bifida and anencephaly, the latter of which is a fatal condition.

The U.S. Public Health Service in 1992 and the Institute of Medicine in 1998 began to recommend that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms of folic acid every day, from a supplement or fortified foods, in addition to consuming food folate from a varied diet.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) mandated fortification with folic acid of U.S. produced cereals and grain products beginning in January 1998. This was done in an effort to increase the daily consumption of folic acid by the targeted population of women of childbearing age. As a result, there has been an approximately 26% reduction in the incidence of NTDs when compared to pre-fortification rates. This progress is far below the 50-70% reduction of NTDs that could be expected if all women of childbearing age consumed the recommended 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.

In addition to NTDs there is a growing body of research that suggests an association between adequate folic acid intake and reduced risk for other birth defects, including orofacial clefts, heart defects, urinary tract defects, and limb deficiencies. Emerging research also shows that folate may help reduce the risk for cardiovascular diseases like coronary heart disease and stroke, certain cancers, and diseases that affect the brain or mental function such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and depression.

Position Statement

The FFAC supports:

- (1) Recommendations by the United States Public Health Service and Institute of Medicine that all women of childbearing age consume 400 micrograms of synthetic folic acid on a daily basis, obtained through dietary supplements, fortified foods, or a combination of both, in addition to consuming food folate from a varied diet.
- (2) FDA's rules for fortification of enriched cereal grain products with folic acid at levels deemed appropriate by the FDA, and appropriate research and monitoring of the population to identify beneficial as well as unintentional effects (e.g., masking of vitamin B12 deficiency) associated with fortification.
- (3) Continued and sustained education for all women of childbearing age, plus other population groups, concerning the health benefits of folic acid. This includes the development and dissemination of educational materials and programs to educate health care professionals and the public concerning the benefits of folic acid for the prevention of birth defects as well as the possible benefits of folic acid for reducing risks for chronic disease across the lifespan.
- (4) The institution of clinical guidelines that promote folic acid awareness as a routine and standard part of the delivery of preventive or other health care services.
- (5) National, state, and local surveys to monitor and measure knowledge, awareness and behavior regarding folic acid, particularly among women of childbearing age.
- (6) Basic, epidemiologic, and appropriate experimental research regarding the association between folic acid and birth defects and chronic disease risk reduction.