Fortifying the Australian and New Zealand food supply with iodine
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Background – Evidence from studies and surveys have shown that New Zealand and some parts of Australia are experiencing a re-emergence of mild-to-moderate iodine deficiency over the past 20 years. Food Standards Australia New Zealand has been asked by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council to give priority consideration to increasing the iodine content of the food supply.

Objective – To reduce the prevalence of iodine deficiency in affected parts of Australia and in New Zealand by means of mandatory iodine fortification of food.

Design – A benefit/risk analysis was carried out to determine a suitable approach to iodine fortification of food that would permit increases in iodine intakes where needed without compromising public safety. The analysis included:

- assessment of the health risks associated with the current deficiency;
- health risks and benefits of mandatory fortification based on dietary intake estimates of two fortification scenarios involving cereal based foods or all salt containing processed foods; and partial iodisation of discretionary salt;
- considerations of consumer choice; and
- analysis of the cost and qualitative benefits of implementing a mandatory fortification solution.

Following the benefit/risk analysis a risk management approach and communication strategy were formulated.

Outcomes – The replacement of non-iodised with iodised salt in selected cereal products was proposed. Dietary intake estimates indicated that this approach had an impact comparable to replacing non-iodised with iodised salt in all processed foods. However, restricting mandatory fortification to selected cereal products has a considerably lower impact on local industry and trade. Public comment was sought on this proposal in September and a final recommendation is expected in November 2006.

Conclusions – The replacement of non-iodised with iodised salt in selected cereal products is the draft preferred option for mandatory fortification with iodine as at September 2006.