



**CONSIDERATION OF MANDATORY
FORTIFICATION WITH IODINE
FOR AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

**COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION STRATEGY
FOR AUSTRALIA**

April 2008

Introduction

Recent studies show a large proportion of Australians do not have enough iodine in their diets. Health professionals consider this is a problem because insufficient iodine can cause a wide range of adverse health effects. In a child, it can impair the development of the brain and nervous system, with the most crucial period being from when the child is developing in its mother's womb to its third year of life. As adults age, iodine deficiency increases the risk of thyroid dysfunction. Both adults and children are at risk of developing goitre, an enlargement of the thyroid gland that appears as a swelling in the neck.

The Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council asked Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to consider mandatory fortification of the food supply to address this deficiency by requiring the salt in bread to be replaced with iodised salt. This standard has already been developed and gazetted into law in New Zealand. Following advice from the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, FSANZ has begun work on an Australian standard. Subject to the necessary approvals, the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* draft Standard will become law 12 months after gazettal of the Standard so it will generally align with the mandatory fortification of bread with folic acid. This allows time for the salt industry to increase its iodised salt production and for bread manufacturers to make the required changes to their manufacturing and labelling processes. It will also allow time for consumers to be informed about the changes.

Australia and New Zealand have worked closely together to develop key communication and education messages to raise awareness and understanding of the iodine fortification Standard. New Zealand has tailored these messages to produce a Strategy to suit its own population. This Strategy is relevant to Australia.

FSANZ will collaborate with other organisations that play an important role in informing and educating consumers, industry and other key stakeholders to implement this Strategy.

Aim

Our aim for this Strategy is to increase awareness of the iodine fortification standard and how it will be introduced.

Target audiences

The following matrix identifies target audiences for the Strategy.

Target audience*	Tier one People who need advice and information about the issue and the iodine fortification standard	Tier two People who need to understand and support the iodine fortification standard	Tier three People responsible for implementing the iodine fortification standard	Tier four People responsible for monitoring implementation of the iodine fortification standard
<i>Consumers</i> , particularly women of child-bearing age, parents and carers of young children up to three years old	√			
<i>Industry</i> , including salt & bread manufacturers	√	√	√	
<i>Health professionals</i> , including those who consumers seek advice from on dietary and nutrition issues	√	√		
<i>Governments</i> of Australia responsible for monitoring, enforcing and educating people about the food regulatory system	√	√		√
<i>Media</i>	√	√		

*Each of these target audiences can be segmented into subgroups. For example, among women of child-bearing age, there are those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For industry the main subgroups are the salt industry and bread manufacturers. Among health professionals are general practitioners, nurses, endocrinologists, obstetricians, dietitians, nutritionists, complementary healthcare practitioners, pharmacists, childbirth educators, health educators and facilitators working with Maori, Pacific Peoples, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Key messages

All target audiences must be able to recognise the key messages as coming from a knowledgeable, authoritative source. The key messages must also:

- reflect the needs and expectations of the different target audiences
- present an accurate, balanced perspective on the issues
- avoid creating undue alarm.

In developing the iodine fortification standard, FSANZ sought and received advice on key messages and their relevance for the different target audiences. FSANZ will continue to collaborate with other organisations and the Australian Government and state and territory governments, to ensure the messages are tailored to reach each target audience.

Key messages for all target audiences

About iodine

- Iodine is an essential nutrient.
- Iodine is very important for regulating metabolism, including body heat.
- Iodine is essential for the normal development of the brain and nervous system of children, especially during pregnancy, and in the first 2-3 years of life.
- Soils in Australia tend to be low in iodine, as a result foods grown in these soils are also low in iodine.
- There are only a few food dietary sources of iodine rich food, including dairy products, seafood, kelp, eggs.
- Additional dietary iodine can come from supplements and medicines containing iodine.
- A lack of iodine in the diet can affect people of all ages, but babies and young children are most at risk.
- Low iodine levels in pregnant women increases the risk of their babies' brains not developing properly.
- In studies conducted overseas, a low iodine level has been shown to affect a child's growth, hearing, coordination and alertness. This effect is irreversible if it occurs before the child is three years old.
- Low iodine levels may also cause enlargement of the thyroid gland in the neck, a condition known as goitre.

About mandatory iodine fortification

- Evidence shows a re-emergence of iodine deficiency in the Australian population.
- Mandatory fortification of bread using iodised salt will increase the amount of iodine in the food supply.
- Fortifying the food supply will help prevent harm caused by low iodine levels.
- Iodised salt will replace non-iodised salt currently added when making bread.
- The iodine fortification standard is based on the best available scientific evidence and is consistent with international guidance and experience.
- The risk of adverse health consequences from this additional iodine is small across all groups.
- The cost to consumers is likely to be very small.

Further messages

For women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or considering becoming pregnant

- Iodine is as important to the development of an unborn baby as folic acid.
- Even with mandatory fortification, pregnant and breastfeeding women may still require iodine supplements.
- All women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or considering becoming pregnant should ask their health professional for advice about their individual dietary needs.

For parents of young children

- Bread fortified with iodised salt is a good source of iodine.
- Young children should avoid eating salt added at the table or in cooking.

For individuals with thyroid disorders and/or possible iodine sensitivities

- The level of iodine fortification is set to minimise any potential health risks.
- Manufacturers must identify iodised salt on ingredient labels on all packaged food.
- Organic bread will not be required to contain iodised salt.
- Seek advice from a health professional about your individual iodine requirements.

For people who do not eat bread

- While it will be mandatory for bread to be fortified with iodised salt, manufacturers may use iodised salt in foods other than bread. This provides manufacturers with the opportunity to make products as alternative iodine sources for people who do not eat bread.
- Manufacturers must identify iodised salt on ingredient lists for packaged foods as a guide for consumers.
- Seek advice from a health professional about your individual dietary iodine requirements.
- Good dietary sources of iodine include dairy products, seafood, kelp, eggs.

For people who eat organic bread

- Organic bread will not be required to contain iodised salt.
- People who do not eat bread fortified with iodine will need to obtain their iodine from other sources.

For industry

- The replacement of salt with iodised salt in bread is the preferred approach to address the re-emergence of iodine deficiency in Australia. The iodisation level must be in the range of 25-65 mg iodine per kg of salt.
- The iodine fortification standard allows the current voluntary permissions for the use of iodised salt to continue while also requiring the mandatory fortification of salt used in bread with iodine.
- Ingredient lists on packaged bread must identify the presence of iodised salt.
- FSANZ will prepare an Industry Implementation Guide to clarify details of the mandatory iodine fortification standard, its implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- To give industry time to make the required changes to manufacturing and labelling and to alert consumers to the changes, FSANZ is recommending a one year transition period for implementation after the standard becomes law.
- Monitoring of the new iodine fortification standard will be essential, and will provide a basis to gauge both the ongoing effectiveness and safety of mandatory iodine fortification in reducing iodine deficiency in Australia.

For health professionals

- Individuals with pre-existing thyroid disease are more sensitive to increases in iodine intake.
- The level set by the iodine fortification standard should not aggravate existing thyroid disease in most cases.
- Individuals with pre-existing thyroid disease, and women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or considering becoming pregnant, may seek your advice about the need for additional iodine.

For the governments of Australia and internal stakeholders

- Governments play a pivotal role in monitoring and enforcing the food regulatory system and in educating people.
- Consumers and industry need accurate and timely information about the iodine fortification standard and its implementation.
- Monitoring of the new iodine fortification standard will be essential, and will provide a basis to gauge both the ongoing effectiveness and safety of mandatory iodine fortification in reducing iodine deficiency in Australia.

For the media

- Information and resources about mandatory fortification with iodine are available from the FSANZ website.
- FSANZ can provide spokespeople to give interviews and briefings about mandatory fortification with iodine.
- Industry is a key player in facilitating this public health initiative.

Communication Approach

The approach underpinning this communications strategy is based on FSANZ's core business as the regulator of food standards for Australia and New Zealand.

As the food standards regulator, FSANZ's prime role in the iodine fortification of bread is, following the development of the standard, to ensure industry understands the standard, and how and when it is to be implemented and monitored. FSANZ will therefore take the lead in communicating with and educating industry during and following the implementation phase.

FSANZ's secondary role is to educate consumers and health professionals on the benefits of iodine fortification. For this FSANZ will provide technical, scientific and implementation information and advice to stakeholders, jurisdictions and partners. If required, it will act as a catalyst to coordinate the various players with the main objectives being consistent messages and inclusion of these messages in all appropriate activities using all appropriate channels to reach the above audiences.

The communication approach recognises:

- The Department of Health and Aging, State and Territory Health Departments, and related agencies have prime responsibility for communicating health messages.
- Jurisdictions, peak bodies, agencies and other partner organisations have high levels of understanding of the most effective and efficient communication channels and activities for their target audiences.
- Jurisdictions, peak bodies, agencies and other partner organisations have invaluable networks for the effective and efficient dissemination of key messages.
- Messages may need to be tailored for different jurisdictions based on known iodine status and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Communication Channels and Activities

FSANZ will use a range of communication channels and activities to reach the target audiences. Timing for particular activities will depend on the resources available within FSANZ.

Specifically, FSANZ will:

- Issue media releases:
 - after gazettal and when a user guide is available
 - when implementation phase is nearing completion
 - other times, as appropriate.
- Develop and implement a coordinated program of briefings with the media, including interviews with mainstream and specialist media, print and electronic.
- Prepare an Industry Implementation Guide to clarify details of the mandatory iodine fortification standard, its implementation, monitoring and evaluation for the food industry, jurisdictions and the FSANZ Advice Line.
- Produce fact sheets and associated information materials on the FSANZ website.
- Collaborate with other agencies on educational and health promotional initiatives relating to mandatory iodine fortification. For example, work with the Department of Health and Ageing to include iodine messages into the pregnancy lifestyle script.
- Liaise with the Consumer Liaison Committee and in consultation with partners:
 - review its existing consumer education materials, and develop new ones as appropriate, and
 - promote key messages through a website linkage strategy.
- Provide media releases and background material highlighting key points to health professional, consumer and industry newsletters, journals and other print and electronic bulletins.
- Participate in workshops, briefings, and other consultative fora as appropriate.
- Report activities to the FSANZ Board.

Evaluation

FSANZ will monitor the implementation of this Strategy as part of the overall monitoring and evaluation of the standard.

Responsibility for establishing and funding a monitoring system to assess the impact of mandatory fortification on the population extends beyond our responsibilities under the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*, and will require the involvement of health and regulatory agencies at the Commonwealth, State and Territory level in Australia.