

# The Nation

## Iodine deficiency risking 19m newborns

Pakistan is among the six developing states where 19 million newborn are at risk because of iodine deficiency, it has been revealed at a seminar.

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection organised the advocacy seminar in collaboration with Unicef and ICT District Health Department on Wednesday. Medics, representatives from Basic Health Unit, Rural Health Centre and officials joined in.

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection Executive Coordinator Nadeem Iqbal called for stepping up efforts to correct the misconception of use of iodised salt.

“Healthcare providers are the primary source to disseminate the awareness messages. Iodisation of salt is the most inexpensive way of preventing iodine deficiency,” he said.

Iqbal further advocated, “Previously, goiter was believed to be caused by iodine deficiency but now iodine deficiency is also being linked with mental impairment. To get over such serious problems, healthcare provider should raise awareness among the masses.”

He also cited his network’s work for the purpose, saying a number of activities in rural areas of Islamabad and sensitised people especially women and children and local population of the area.

Sharing his team’s experience, he said that during an awareness session, people asked as to why docs did not advise use of iodised salt if it was vital. Thus there is a need of raising awareness by community doctors, he insisted, adding that the iodised salt usage was an easy way to get over mental disorders.

“There is a misconception that iodine affects fertility. Iodine deficiency causes complications among mums-to-be, indeed,” it was highlighted during the sitting

“Mild iodine deficiency can result in a significant loss in learning ability. Other effects include increased risk of stillbirth, miscarriage, and goiter for women and learning difficulties in children.”

Highlighting the importance of the issue, Dr Fawad Khalid, medical officer health department-ICT, said, "All we can do is to focus on educating consumers, so that they demand iodised salt from the retailers. The community's refusal to buy salt without iodine will give producers a commercial incentive to change."