

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Iodine deficiency in children represents only the tip of the iceberg

Iodine deficiency in children represents only the tip of the iceberg. Most children born to iodine-deficient mothers appear normal but have suffered brain damage and loss in IQ points, affecting their ability to develop to their full potential. These seemingly normal children will later have difficulty learning in school and staying in school.

Dr. Azhar Khan, district health officer at the District Health Department, Islamabad Capital Territory, sounded this warning note at an advocacy seminar held in the Rural Health Centre, Bhara Kahu, on Friday. Organised by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, District Health Department-ICT and the Unicef, the seminar engaged the rural health community, including doctors, medical assistants, lady health supervisors, lady health visitors and lady health workers in a bid to apprise them of the benefits of iodised salt usage.

Dr. Azhar Khan agreed that doctors in the community are more inclined towards curative rather than preventive side, a shortcoming that leads to major issues. “The message of iodized salt consumption should be prioritized and disseminated along with the other health messages in ongoing campaigns,” he suggested.

Addressing the healthcare providers, Dr. Azhar Khan said, “All iodine deficiency disorders can be prevented with just one teaspoon of iodine consumed in tiny amounts on a regular basis over a lifetime at a very little cost.”

Earlier, the executive coordinator of TheNetwork, Nadeem Iqbal, informed that an estimated 2.25 million Pakistani babies are born each year with intellectual impairment caused by iodine deficiency in pregnancy. About 7% of school-going children (6-12 years) either have palpable or visible goitres on clinical examination.

In a presentation delivered on the occasion, Unicef’s nutrition officer Dr. Syed Qadir said, “Evidence from various studies tells us that an inadequate supply of iodine during pregnancy results in irreversible damage to the foetal brain.” Universal salt iodisation is the most effective way to ensure that every child gets enough iodine.

The seminar ended with a question-answer session during which the participants shared their concerns related to iodised salt. They vowed to contribute to a countrywide awareness drive for iodised salt use.