

Ways for universal salt iodisation discussed

Universal iodisation of salt is the most inexpensive way of preventing iodine deficiency disorders. There was a time when iodine deficiency was believed to be a major cause of goitre; today, it is also being linked with mental impairment. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things to raise public demand for the use of iodised salt.

Views to this effect echoed at an advocacy seminar organised Tuesday by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection with support from Unicef. The objective of the meeting was to discuss ways to promote Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) so that children have better intelligence levels, and women can be protected from health complications associated with iodine deficiency.

The consultation was attended by multiple stakeholders including representatives of salt processors, Utility Stores Corporation, Edhi Homes, Aga Khan Health Service-managed salt processor, Pakistan Hotels Association, SOS Villages, bakeries, Canteen Stores Department, as well as the Islamabad and Rawalpindi chambers of commerce and industry, among others. Experts from partner partners including Micronutrient Initiative, World Food Programme, GAIN, and WHO also participated in the interactive session.

Levelling the ground for interaction, the executive coordinator of TheNetwork Nadeem Iqbal said iodisation of salt is the most inexpensive way of preventing iodine deficiency disorders. “Previously, goitre was believed to be caused by iodine deficiency but now iodine deficiency is also being linked with mental impairment,” said Nadeem, advising the participants to individually and collectively contribute towards USI.

“Being large consumers of salt, you could play a vital role in creating public demand for iodised salt,” Nadeem exhorted the participants by saying.

Unicef’s nutrition Officer Dr. Saeed Qadir termed iodine deficiency as the single most common yet preventable cause of mental handicap worldwide. “Iodised salt usage is an easy and sustainable solution to such disorders. Iodine is either available in sea food or in iodised salt. Many countries have already achieved the goal of USI but we are lagging behind,” he pointed out.

Dr. Saeed dismissed the misconception that iodine affects fertility among consumers. On the contrary, it is iodine deficiency that causes complications including abortion among pregnant females, he clarified. He called for bringing all stakeholders on board and utilising all components of corporate social responsibility to highlight the significance of iodised salt for health. He also recommended the need for large consumers to display posters at outlets to build public awareness of the benefits of iodised salt.

A representative of Pakistan Hotels Association sought the support of legislators for the cause. The general manager of PTDC motels said, all motels are using iodised salt. On a suggestion from TheNetwork, he promised to inform clients that they are using iodised salt for better health.

Representing the business community, former president of RCCI S M Naseem said the salt iodisation campaign started in 1970s has demonstrated its successes and failures. Some of the issues shadowing the campaign include continuous supply of potassium iodate, maintaining standards of iodisation, and making its use mandatory under a national law. Nadia Abid from MI and Dr. Khyzer Ashraf from WFP replied that there is no problem in the supply of iodate, and that mixing it in salt does not increase its cost.

Shama Khan, the director of SOS Children’s Village said, it is mandatory for every SOS village to use iodised salt. Muhammad Rafiq from Canteen Stores Department said, they keep both iodised as well as non-iodised salt at their outlets but assured that efforts will be made for promotion of iodine at their points of sale.