

Britain: Folic acid in bread, flour

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In a major about-face, a British agency is poised to order that folic acid be added to all bread and flour sold in nation, the Times of London reported.

Four years ago, the Food Standards Agency rejected mandatory addition of the vitamin, citing concerns it would mask vitamin deficiencies in the elderly.

However, its change of heart is aimed at reducing the number of babies born with spina bifida and other defects by 40 percent, the newspaper said it had learned.

"The potential health benefit of the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid is substantial; whereas the available evidence suggests the potential risks are uncertain," said an advisory group's report to the government agency.

The requirement, expected this week, would be the first time since World War II that British foodmakers have been ordered to add nutrients, the newspaper said.

Canada, Chile and the United States already require the addition of folic acid to foods.

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