



# Spina Bifida and Folic Acid Supplementation

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- **Context:** Health experts (including those from AIIMS) have highlighted that India has one of the world's highest burdens of **Neural Tube Defects (NTDs)**, specifically Spina Bifida, with 4.5 to 9.46 cases per 1,000 births.
- **The Disease:** Spina Bifida is a birth defect where the spine and spinal cord don't form properly. It occurs in the first few weeks of pregnancy—often before a woman knows she is pregnant.
- **The Prevention Gap:** \* **Folic Acid (Vitamin B9):** Daily intake of 400mcg before conception can prevent 70% of cases.
- **The Issue:** While many countries have mandatory **folic acid fortification** of staple foods (like flour), India currently relies on voluntary supplementation, which often starts too late (after pregnancy is confirmed).
- **Proposed Solution:** Experts are pushing for a national policy for the fortification of salt, rice, or wheat flour to address the "hidden epidemic."