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Spina Bifida & Folic Acid Deficiency

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Subject: GS-II (Social Justice & Health) | GS-III (Science & Technology)

News Context: Despite the high burden, India is yet to mandate universal food fortification for folic acid to combat Neural Tube Defects (NTDs).

- **Understanding the Condition:** Spina Bifida is a Neural Tube Defect (NTD) where the spine and spinal cord don't form properly during the first month of pregnancy.
- **The Scientific Link:** There is a direct correlation between Folic Acid (Vitamin B9) deficiency in the mother and NTDs in the infant. Scientific evidence suggests that taking 400 micrograms of folic acid daily pre-conception can prevent 70% of such cases.
- **The Indian Burden:** India accounts for a significant portion of the global NTD burden due to high rates of malnutrition and lack of awareness regarding "pre-conception" health.
- **Wholistic Insight:** For UPSC, connect this to Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. While India has a "Food Fortification" policy (FSSAI), it is largely voluntary for many staples. A shift toward mandatory fortification of rice or flour with folic acid (as seen in the US or UK) is a recurring policy debate.

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