

Technical Consultation:
Folate Status in Women and Neural Tube Defect (NTD) Risk-Reduction

SCOPING QUESTIONS

Objective of the technical consultation: To develop a road map to better inform and prioritize investments in NTD risk-reduction; to help guide implementation efforts in terms of feasibility of interventions and the potential for acceleration; and to identify the knowledge gaps that remain including addressing any questions on safety and efficacy of folic acid interventions.

The draft scoping questions are crafted in line with the main investigative areas for the committee:

- A. Magnitude of the burden
- B. Intervention options
- C. Prioritized investments

Scoping Questions

1. What is the magnitude of folate inadequacy, related to NTD risk and burden globally?
2. Is the magnitude of folate inadequacy, related to NTD risk, large enough to declare NTDs a global public health problem?
3. What intervention options are available and/or possible to help address NTDs in developing countries/with the most vulnerable populations?
4. How best can we address the burden of NTDs in developing countries/with the world's most vulnerable populations? [Road Map]

A. MAGNITUDE

- 1. What is the magnitude of folate inadequacy, related to NTD risk and burden globally?**

Technical issues/considerations

- a. How is NTD burden defined?
- b. What is the current knowledge related to NTD risk and burden?
- c. What is the global prevalence of folate inadequacy in women of reproductive age?
- d. What is the fraction of NTDs that is currently attributable to folate inadequacy?

- 2. Is the magnitude of folate inadequacy related to NTD risk, large enough to declare NTDs a global public health problem?**

Technical issues/considerations for assessing incidence of NTDs

- a. What methods can be used to determine/assess the magnitude of NTD burden globally, and what are the key challenges?
- b. How do we best determine where the need is greatest?

Technical issues/considerations for assessing folate status in women of reproductive age

- c. How do we determine burden?

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- d. How do we best measure/assess burden?

Technical issues/considerations for safety of interventions:

- e. Are there safety concerns that need to be considered in relation to folic acid interventions to reduce NTD risk at the population level?
f. What is the strength of the evidence in relation to specific safety concerns?

Technical issues/considerations for consideration of B12 in assessing NTD risk:

- g. Should vitamin B12 status be considered in assessing NTD risk?
[Note: The question of whether there are safety concerns related to Vitamin B12 interventions independent of folic acid safety concerns will not be addressed as the IOM did not establish a UL due to lack of evidence of any harmful effects of B12 at any level of intake.]

B. INTERVENTION OPTIONS

- 3. What intervention options are available and/or possible to help address NTDs in developing countries/with the most vulnerable populations?**

Technical issues/considerations

- a. What interventions are available?
b. What alternate interventions might be considered to reach high-risk populations?
c. What opportunities exist for interventions with folic acid and vitamin B12?
d. On what basis would a combined folic acid/vitamin B12 intervention be implemented?
e. What is the estimated impact (i.e., the percent reduction of NTDs) given the different interventions and coverage scenarios?
f. Can we ensure the safety of current and proposed interventions?

C. PRIORITIZED INVESTMENTS

- 4. How best can we address the burden of NTDs in developing countries/with the world's most vulnerable populations?**

Technical issues/considerations [Road map for action]

- a. What strategies should be considered to address current gaps in reducing the risk of NTDs and in developing countries and among the most vulnerable?
b. What are the key success factors for implementation?
c. How do we identify and prioritize the best opportunities for investments?