

A GUIDE FOR GOVERNMENTS: FOOD FORTIFICATION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Food Fortification Initiative

Over two billion people—one out of every three on the planet—are not getting enough micronutrients, the vitamins and minerals the body requires in small amounts to survive and thrive. COVID-19, the disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), has serious implications for those most vulnerable to micronutrient malnutrition as well as the essential nutrition services that prevent malnutrition's debilitating effects.

The consequences of micronutrient malnutrition are extensive, including devastating birth defects for babies, impaired brain development in young children, and reduced work capacity among adults that stunts lives and economies.

More than ever, **food fortification** with iron, folic acid, zinc, and other essential nutrients **is a life-saving intervention vital to reducing the risk of malnutrition—before, during, and after pandemics.**

	CHALLENGE The COVID-19 pandemic may result in:	SOLUTION Fortification of staple foods for healthier, stronger, and smarter people
	Short- and long-term disruptions to food systems	STRENGTHEN THE FOOD SYSTEM: Fortification of staple foods mitigates delays or disruptions in food chains by ensuring the food that people can access is packed with nutrients.
	Decreased availability of nutritious foods, especially for the poor and most vulnerable	ACCESS TO INEXPENSIVE, SHELF-STABLE FORTIFIED FOODS: Fortification ensures that essential vitamins and minerals reach everyone—especially important for lower income populations who cannot afford supplements.
	Increased risk for women, who make up the bulk of frontline health workers and primary caregivers, and for pregnant women affected by healthcare system disruptions	STRENGTHEN THE FRONTLINES: Fortified foods directly improve the health of women and mothers, which affects the quality of caring for children, improves pregnancy outcomes, and babies' health.
	A rise in the global prevalence of all forms of malnutrition, including micronutrient malnutrition	STRENGTHEN SOCIETIES: Food fortification benefits whole societies by improving individuals' health at every point in life—from conception to aging. Food fortification strengthens immunity and it contributes to reducing stunting, improving children's brain development and school performance, and boosting adults' income earning capacity. Fortification can lead to economic development of countries and progress towards their Sustainable Development Goals.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The frontline of every country's health system are the immune systems of its people. Several micronutrients, including folic acid and iron, may influence the susceptibility of a person to infectious diseases and the course and outcome of such diseases. Good nutrition helps boost the immune system, lowers the risk of becoming critically ill with infectious diseases, and supports faster recovery when infected. While more data needs to become available on the role of nutrition to the severity of COVID-19, the role of micronutrients to the optimal function of immune systems is well established.

FORTIFICATION SAVES LIVES

Fortification is a safe, very low-cost, effective, and evidence-based public health strategy to ensure that everyone—including the most vulnerable—has access to the essential micronutrients that increase productivity and save lives. Furthermore, fortification is an adaptable intervention well-suited for the social distancing requirements demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic: large-scale fortification does not require direct person-to-person contact to deliver micronutrients to beneficiaries.

GOVERNMENTS' CRITICAL ROLE IN NUTRITION

Continued supply of fortified foods will ensure that a rise in micronutrient malnutrition will not add to COVID-19's steep toll on lives and economies. Governments can help during the COVID-19 pandemic by maintaining and strengthening national fortification programs.

- Ensure fortified foods are distributed in social safety net programs to prevent a potential rise in micronutrient deficiencies for vulnerable populations.
- Clarify that logistics suppliers for the food industry are essential service providers to avoid a breakdown in supplies and disruption to the food system.
- Ensure that public health commodities including vitamin and mineral premix for food fortification are prioritized for clearance at ports or at borders.
- Exempt or decrease taxes on vitamin and mineral premix from government-imposed charges.
- Create policies for a premix national stockpile to ensure local availability and prevent delays from lockdowns.

ABOUT FFI

The [Food Fortification Initiative](#) (FFI) champions effective grain fortification so people have the nutrition they need to be smarter, stronger, and healthier. FFI helps country leaders plan, implement, and monitor fortification of industrially milled wheat flour, maize flour, and rice. Established in 2002, FFI is the only global group that focuses exclusively on these commonly consumed grains through public, private, and civic partnerships.

RESOURCES

[Micronutrient Forum](#)
[UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#)
[UN World Food Program](#)

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Enhancing Grains for Healthier Lives