

NUTRITION ADVOCACY IN PUBLIC INTEREST-India (NAPi)

August 5, 2020

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Minister of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India,
Chairman, Executive Board
World Health Organisation (WHO)
Nirman Bhawan
New Delhi.

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Sub: WHO's Updated Guidelines on Antenatal Care Nutrition for Multiple Micronutrients and Vitamin D Supplementation

Dear Dr Harshvardhan,

Greetings from NAPi !

We do hope that you and your family are well and safe during these challenging times.

We, the Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest in India (NAPi) are a national think tank on nutrition –comprising independent experts in epidemiology, human nutrition, community nutrition and pediatrics, medical education, administration and management; having decades of experience in respective fields.

As you are aware, on July 30, 2020, after a thorough review of the available evidence, the World Health Organization (WHO) released the '*Updated Guidelines on Antenatal Care Nutrition for Multiple Micronutrients and Vitamin D Supplementation*' (PDFs attached). These Guidelines **do NOT** recommend routine use of either Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS) or Vitamin D supplementation. MMS is recommended only for specified *rigorous research context*.

We would like to draw your attention to an important issue around these new and updated guidelines.

India due to its sheer size of the annual births, is viewed as a fertile market for international nutrient products with no real-life value for money, in the guise of humanitarian calls to alleviate the misery of millions. In this context, intense advocacy has been ongoing for replacing routine 'iron and folic acid' tablets with the multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) in all pregnant women in the country. These are almost twice as costlier.

We understand that intense pressure is being applied on the States to switch over from routine antenatal 'Iron Folic Acid' Supplementation to MMS by the vested interests with clear conflicts of interest (manufacturers of supplements), and international organizations, This shift would be without any functional benefit and have a huge programme cost implication. This initiative is being carefully camouflaged through mis-information, including through Webinars or as conduct of research, without adhering to the letter and spirit of the WHO Guidelines. Research and Covid-19 are being used as excuses to pressurise for routine antenatal MMS in States, which could attain

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permanence. This is an example of “no functional benefit and costly” intervention in the mistaken belief of achieving wonders.

It is our earnest plea that you should intervene in national interest. Such efforts to shift the policy should be strongly rebutted at all levels. We would request you to reach out to the State Health Ministers also for this purpose.

We look forward to a positive response from your end.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Members of NAPi

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