



# 216,600

annual cases of spina bifida and anencephaly occur worldwide that can be

## prevented



Images by US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### Folic acid (vitamin B9) prevents spina bifida and anencephaly

# 23%

Only about **60 countries** have mandatory folic acid fortification policy for wheat flour, maize flour, and/or rice. This is **preventing just 23%** of all folic acid-preventable spina bifida and anencephaly worldwide.



Countries with effective mandatory folic acid fortification policies for wheat flour, maize flour, and/or rice

#### Food fortification with folic acid is...



Effective everywhere

Safe for everyone



Food fortification with folic acid is highly cost saving



There is a need for a **World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution** supporting large-scale food fortification with folic acid.

A WHA resolution will accelerate fortification policy and help countries reach their **2030 Sustainable Development Goals** on child mortality and health equity.

### Be a champion for folic acid fortification

- ✓ Saves lives
- ✓ Saves money
- ✓ Saves resources



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## A World Health Assembly Resolution:

## Folic Acid Fortification to Prevent Spina Bifida



### WHA75 SIDE EVENT

Geneva, May 24<sup>th</sup>

6:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Hilton Geneva Hotel & Conference Centre

Route Francois-Peyrot 34  
Geneva, 1218, Switzerland



Recognizing the 63rd World Health Assembly's Resolution on Birth Defects that appealed to member states to prioritize prevention of birth defects, we are concerned by the high number of pregnancies affected by folic acid-preventable spina bifida and anencephaly globally.

World-wide at least 300,000 pregnancies are estimated to be affected with spina bifida and anencephaly annually, and 75% of them result in elective terminations, stillbirths, or under-five deaths. Those who survive have life-long paralysis and neurologic impairment; most require multiple surgeries, unavailable in low- and middle-income countries. Families face stigma and cannot afford the cost of care.

Folic acid fortification is the most effective public health strategy to prevent spina bifida and anencephaly equitably in the population. Fortified staple foods provide folic acid to women of reproductive age at a critical time in pregnancy, preventing spina bifida and anencephaly.

Mandatory food fortification with adequate folic acid has been implemented in 58 countries since the late 1990s. Folic acid fortification is safe, effective, and has high cost-benefit ratio. Yet, over 100 countries lack this intervention, adversely impacting the most vulnerable populations.

This side event will bring together key stakeholders, including policymakers, patient care leaders, NGOs, and member states, to discuss a way forward toward a WHA resolution on folic acid fortification to prevent spina bifida.

## Program

Registration & Mingling	6.00PM
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Welcome & Introductions	6.30PM
Gail Rosseau, MD - <i>G4 Alliance</i> Luz De Regil, PhD - <i>WHO</i>	
.....	
Spina bifida: a patient perspective	6.35PM
Nebiyat Tesfaye, MD <i>ReachAnother Foundation</i>	
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Spina bifida and anencephaly: treatment, impact, and consequences	6.40PM
Rick Boop, MD <i>St Jude Children's Research Hospital</i>	
.....	
Epidemiology of spina bifida and anencephaly: a global public health concern in need of prevention	6.50PM
Vijaya Kancharla, PhD <i>Emory University - Center for Spina Bifida Prevention</i>	
.....	
Folic acid fortification – the safe and effective action towards spina bifida prevention	7.00PM
Helena Pachón, PhD <i>Food Fortification Initiative</i>	
.....	
A public-private-civil society partnership for science-based advocacy	7.10PM
Sylvia Roozen, PhD <i>International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus</i>	
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Moderated Q&A and panel discussion	7.20PM
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The WHA Resolution	7.40PM
German Escobar <i>Vice-Minister of Health, Colombia</i>	
.....	
Call to Action	7.45PM
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Adjourn to refreshments and individual discussion	7.50PM