



FOOD

Nourishing India: The Role of Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018 in Fighting Micronutrient Deficiency

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Introduction

In the fight against micronutrient deficiencies, India's Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018, represent a landmark initiative to enhance public health. Formulated under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, these regulations aim to improve the nutritional quality of staple foods by adding essential vitamins and minerals. Coming into force on January 1, 2019, the regulations provide a strong framework for food fortification, superseding earlier guidelines except for nutraceuticals and foods for special dietary uses.

Understanding the Regulations: Key Definitions

To comprehend the scope and objectives of these regulations, it is crucial to understand the key terms:

1. **Act:** The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, underpins the regulations.
2. **Fortification:** The process of deliberately adding essential micronutrients to food to improve its nutritional quality while minimizing health risks.
3. **Fortificant:** Substances added to food to provide micronutrients, excluding those used in nutraceuticals or special dietary foods.
4. **Fortified Food:** Any food product that has undergone fortification as specified by the regulations.
5. **Fortified Processed Foods:** Industrially processed foods fortified under these regulations, including products like cereals and milk.
6. **Micronutrients:** Essential vitamins, minerals, and trace elements vital for human health and development.
7. **Quality Assurance:** Measures applied during manufacturing to ensure compliance with food safety standards.
8. **Staple Foods:** Commonly consumed foods such as rice, wheat, milk, oil, and salt.

Standards of Fortification

General Principles

The regulations emphasize:

1. **Purpose:**
 - Prevent and reduce micronutrient deficiencies.
 - Improve nutritional health and meet dietary recommendations.
2. **Mandatory Fortification:**
 - Introduced based on public health needs supported by scientific evidence.
 - Directed by the Government of India through the Food Authority.
3. **Prohibited Substances:**
 - The use of heme iron for fortification is not permitted.
4. **Requirements for Processed Foods:**
 - Fortified processed foods must provide 15–30% of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of micronutrients per 600 kcal.

Compliance

Manufacturers must:

1. Ensure micronutrient levels fall within specified ranges detailed in **Schedule-I** (fortified staples) and **Schedule-III** (fortified processed foods).
2. Adhere to an allowable tolerance of –10% of the declared nutrient value on product labels.

General Obligations of Manufacturers

Quality Assurance

To maintain the integrity of fortified foods, manufacturers must:

- Obtain certification from accredited food laboratories.
- Maintain careful records of fortificants used.
- Implement monitoring procedures during production.
- Conduct regular audits and random product testing.

Compliance with Regulations

Fortified foods must adhere to all provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, including those governing manufacturing, packaging, labelling, and distribution.

Packaging and Labelling Requirements

1. Packages must:

- Indicate the fortificant used (e.g., “fortified with...”).
- Display the official fortification logo and the tagline “Sampoorna Poshan Swasth Jeevan.”

2. Iron-fortified products must carry warnings for specific groups, such as individuals with Thalassemia or Sickle Cell Anemia.

3. Comply with the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011.

Promotion of Fortified Food

The Food Authority promotes fortification through:

- Collaboration with government departments to enhance production and distribution.
- Public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the benefits of fortified foods.
- Technical assistance for small-scale manufacturers to implement fortification practices.
- Equipping laboratories to conduct nutrient analysis of fortified foods.

Conclusion

The Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018, shows India’s commitment to combating micronutrient deficiencies. By fortifying commonly consumed staples, the country aims to reduce the prevalence of hidden hunger and improve public health outcomes. With stringent standards, comprehensive quality assurance measures, and wide-reaching promotional efforts, these regulations address nutritional gaps and pave the way for a healthier and more productive nation. Fortification is not merely a regulatory requirement, it is a promise of better health for all.

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