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**NSW Health encourages mothers to take iodine for baby brain development**

NSW Health is encouraging pregnant and breastfeeding women to take iodine supplements, following the release of a report yesterday by the COAG Health Council that found the majority of pregnant women in Australia do not consume enough iodine.

Senior Clinical Advisor in Obstetrics at NSW Health, Professor Michael Nicholl, said while most pregnant women have heard about the importance of folic acid, few know the essential role of iodine in protecting their baby’s brain development.

“Rapid brain growth occurs in the first 1000 days of a baby’s life, but most pregnant and breastfeeding women have inadequate iodine levels,” Professor Nicholl said.

“Since mandatory iodine fortification of bread in 2009 we’ve seen a 30 per cent reduction in iodine deficiency among pregnant women, but there is room for improvement.

“Iodine supports the healthy development of the nervous system, coordination, alertness and the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.”

Pregnant and breastfeeding women need more iodine than the average person – 220 and 270 micrograms per day respectively.

“While women can obtain a good proportion of iodine through a healthy diet, we recommend they consume 150 micrograms per day through supplements,” Professor Nicholl said.

“Most foods in Australia contain only small amounts of iodine. Seafood is an excellent source, but pregnant and breastfeeding women should limit themselves to two serves of cooked seafood per week to avoid the high levels of mercury that are present in some fish.”

Other sources of iodine in food include bread, eggs, dairy and iodised salt.

Jo Dunlop, who is 38 weeks pregnant, takes one pregnancy multivitamin tablet a day that she bought from her local pharmacy.

“Like every mother my baby’s health means the world to me. Thankfully, increasing my iodine levels through supplements has been easy and I strongly encourage other mothers to do this,” Ms Dunlop said.
