Fortification of 3 food items made mandatory in anganwadi centres to curb malnutrition

Government believes food fortification will go a long way in addressing micronutrient deficiencies in young children.

The Union government has made fortification of salt, wheat flour and oil mandatory in foods served to children in all anganwadi centres (mother and child care centre) under the Integrated Child
Development Scheme (ICDS) to curb high prevalence of malnutrition among children under six years.

Launched in 1975, ICDS monitors health and nutrition of children in the 0-6 age group.

The women and child development (WCD) ministry has written to states to ensure “mandatory fortification” of the three food items in the administration of supplementary nutrition programme of the ICDS scheme with “immediate effect.”

At present, 12 states provide one or two staple food items fortified with essential micronutrients. But it was not made mandatory across the country.

While it has been decided to fortify salt with iodine and iron, wheat flour will have to be fortified with iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12 and edible oil with Vitamin A and D.

In a letter to chief secretaries of all state on July 10, WCD secretary Rakesh Srivastava said, “States/UTs are advised to draw up a detailed action plan for implementation of the decision of mandatory fortification of above food articles and ensure to send detailed action taken reports on the same to the ministry from time to time.”
Senior WCD ministry officials said that food fortification will go a long way in addressing micronutrient deficiencies in young children.

According to a national survey data, about 70 % preschool children suffer from iron deficiency and 57% have reported subclinical Vitamin A deficiency. Iodine deficiency is prevalent in 85 % of districts across India.

Government officials said that after ICDS, fortification of the three items will be made mandatory in food being provided to children under the midday meal scheme, and public distribution system.

The human resource and development (HRD) ministry has already set up a committee to finalise the roll out of fortified salt, oil and wheat flour in mid day meals served to primary school children.

Currently, 84 countries provide fortified staple food items.

A group of secretaries constituted last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also recommended mandatory fortification of edible oils, wheat flour and salt with iron, Vitamin B12 and folic acid to target nutritional deficiencies in children.

The Food Safety Standards Authority of India under the ministry of consumer affairs had last year finalised the standards for fortification of food items.