

**WORLDWIDE APPEAL
TO
HEALTH LEADERS AND
MINISTERS OF HEALTH**



Join us in fostering effective prevention programs of neural tube defects

The World Alliance of Organizations for the Prevention and Treatment of Genetic and Congenital Conditions and the International Genetic Alliance invite all health leaders and Ministers of Health to join us in fostering effective prevention programs of neural tube defects. Today, spina bifida paralyzes as many children as poliomyelitis did in the past, and both can be prevented.

The prevention of poliomyelitis, a dream of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, became a landmark of 20th century history. He established the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP), which supported research that led to the development of polio vaccines. The Salk vaccine was licensed in 1955. In 1968 NFIP became the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation of today and is promoting worldwide folic acid food fortification to prevent neural tube defects.

Effective fortification of foods with folic acid is safe, affordable, sustainable and successful in reducing the frequency of spina bifida and anencephaly by at least half. Since 1998 the United States and Canada have required that folic acid be added to flour. This action has benefited families and children and has saved governments money. The same is true for Chile, Costa Rica, and more than 30 other countries that have adopted mandatory fortification with folic acid of commercially available flour. On the other hand, the frequency of neural tube defects continues unabated in many other regions of the world.

In April 2005, the World Life Sciences Forum BioVision and the March of Dimes celebrated the success of the Salk polio vaccination and the virtual elimination of infantile paralysis from the world.

We appeal to health leaders and Ministers of Health to ensure that by 2010, the 20th anniversary of the discovery of the birth defects prevention potential of folic acid, the elimination of new instances of folic acid preventable birth defects can become a worldwide reality.

This appeal is supported by the International Genetic Alliance of Parent and Patient organizations.

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