

Folic acid now added to corn masa flour: FDA

June 17 2016



(HealthDay)—Adding folic acid to corn masa flour could help reduce

birth defects among Hispanic babies in the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration says.

The FDA recently approved the addition of [folic acid](#), a B vitamin, to corn masa flour, which is used in foods such as tortillas, tacos, tortilla chips and tamales.

"By adding folic acid to corn masa flour, we have the opportunity to impact a large segment of the U.S. population and protect parents and their children from the devastating [birth defects](#) that are linked to insufficient folic acid consumed by the mother before and during pregnancy," said Dr. Jonca Bull, director of the FDA's Office of Minority Health.

When consumed by pregnant women, folic acid is known to lower the risk of a baby being born with [neural tube defects](#), which affect the brain, spine and spinal cord.

While folic acid has long been added to certain cereal grain products, many "Hispanic women don't benefit from the folic acid in cereal grain products because those products are not a mainstay of their regular diets—which often are corn masa-based," Bull explained in an agency news release.

That could be one reason why Hispanic women are more likely than other women in the United States to have babies with neural tube defects, the agency noted.

Cynthia Pellegrini is [senior vice president](#) of public policy at the March of Dimes. "[The] FDA worked closely with us to design a study that garnered the information needed to establish the safety of this action," she said. "We're thrilled at the outcome and feel confident that it will address the disparities we've seen in the Latina community and will give

even more babies a healthy start in life."

Women should start consuming 400 micrograms of folic acid a day at least one month before becoming pregnant and throughout pregnancy, the FDA says.

Easy ways to get enough folic acid include eating a bowl of an enriched breakfast cereal; eating other enriched cereal grain products; and taking a daily vitamin or multivitamin supplement that contains folic acid, according to the agency.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [folic acid](#).

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Citation: Folic acid now added to corn masa flour: FDA (2016, June 17) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-06-folic-acid-added-corn-masa.html>

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