

29 AUG 2019



Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act (the Act) which was transferred from the Department of Internal Affairs and received by the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 30 July 2019 for:

"I would like to politely request official information.

Why does the Ministry of Health recommend on their website that the amount of Folic Acid for woman who are trying to get pregnant or are early in the stages of pregnancy take 800mcg of Folic Acid to help reduce the risks of Neural Tubal Defects in infants when the clinical proven trials are 400mcg.

MOH mentions the study of 1999 Berry et al – (please find this proven clinical study here that MOH refer to) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10559448> to take 400mcg as per the study but then recommend 800mcg? Where has this come from, this information? Do you have similar Clinical trial information recommending to double the amount? Please provide.

90% of other OECD countries recommend 400mcg as per the Clinical Trials conducted by the trial as above."

Supplementing with 400mcg folic acid is sufficient to reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs) however, the only folic acid tablets currently available as a registered medicine and subsidised by PHARMAC in New Zealand contain 800mcg or 5,000mcg.

To reduce the risk of having a NTD-affected pregnancy, the Ministry recommends that all women planning pregnancy should take an 800mcg folic acid tablet daily, at least four weeks before conception, and throughout the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

For women at high-risk of a NTD-affected pregnancy, the Ministry recommends they take a 5,000mcg folic acid tablet at least four weeks prior to conception and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Women at high-risk are those who:

- have previously had a NTD-affected pregnancy.
- have a partner or close family member who has a history of NTD or NTD-affected pregnancy.
- are affected by a NTD themselves, or whose partner is affected by NTD.

- are on insulin treatment for diabetes.
- are taking medications known to affect folic acid metabolism, such as anti-convulsants, infertility treatment, vitamin A analogues used to treat acne and some anti-tumour agents (carbamazepine, clomiphene, valproate, retinoids and etretinate).

This advice is contained in the *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women: A Background paper* on page 60, which is publicly available on the Ministry's website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/food-and-nutrition-guidelines-healthy-pregnant-and-breastfeeding-women-background-paper>.

I trust that this information fulfils your request. Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website.

Yours sincerely



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