

FDA Approves Corn Masa Flour Fortification

By: Heather Carskaddan on Apr 19, 2016

On April 14, 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that they will permit fortification of corn masa flour with folic acid to help prevent certain birth defects, effective immediately. The **announcement** reflected a decision to accept a Citizens' Petition filed in 2012 by the March of Dimes, American Academy of Pediatrics, Spina Bifida Association, National Council of La Raza, Royal DSM and Gruma Corporation.

The FDA's announcement calling for the voluntary fortification of corn masa flour will have a major beneficial impact on reducing neural tube defects—severe birth defects of the brain and spine—in particular, among the Hispanic population. Corn masa flour is used to make products such as corn tortillas, a staple product in the diets of many Hispanics, such as Mexican Americans. Mexican-American women have lower folic acid intake than non-Hispanic white women and are less likely than non-Hispanic white women to take vitamin supplements containing folic acid. Hispanic women also tend to be at higher risk for having a baby affected by a neural tube defect.



Research indicates that folic acid fortification of corn masa flour—could increase folic acid intake among Hispanics and reduce the number of neural tube defects in this population. The fortification of corn masa flour with folic acid could increase intake by:

- 3.9 percent for non-Hispanic white women;
- 21 percent for Mexican-American women;
- 42.9 percent for Mexican-American women who reported only consuming enriched cereal grain products such as bread, pasta and corn grits, and who report speaking primarily Spanish. These women do not report consuming ready-to-eat breakfast cereals or dietary supplements containing folic acid.

In 2014 the Teratology Society issued a **Resolution on Folic Acid Fortification** which was published in the journal *Birth Defects Research Part A*.

In 2015 the Teratology Society launched its new **Birth Defects Insights blog series** with a blog titled **Folic Acid Fortification: How a Tortilla Could Be the Perfect Plug for a Hole in the Dike**, authored by Past Presidents Mary Alice Smith and Godfrey Oakley.

Released: April 19, 2016, 9:22 am
Keywords: [Announcement](#)

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