

DH releases Iodine Survey Report

The Department of Health (DH) today (August 31) released the Iodine Survey Report, which is the first territory-wide survey to assess the iodine statuses of the three target vulnerable groups, namely school-aged children, pregnant women and lactating women in Hong Kong. The report analyses and gives an account of the iodine statuses, consumption patterns of specified iodine-rich foods and iodised salt, and use of iodine-containing supplements of the respective target groups, and offers recommendations on iodine intake for pregnant and lactating women.

"Children and pregnant and lactating women are particularly vulnerable to iodine deficiency disorders (IDD), and adequate intake should be ensured in order to meet the requirement," a spokesman for the DH said.

The DH commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct the Iodine Survey to assess the iodine statuses of the three target vulnerable groups. Fieldwork was conducted in 2019 with a total of 1,023 school-aged children, 1,513 pregnant women and 482 lactating women recruited from different regions of Hong Kong. Face-to-face questionnaire interviews and spot urine iodine tests were conducted for all participants, while thyroid ultrasonography was also performed for school-aged children. The median urinary iodine concentration and total goitre rate, which reflect the iodine status in each of the respective subgroups, were assessed.

Based on the survey result, the iodine status of school-aged children is classified as "adequate" and the iodine status of pregnant women taking iodine supplements at an average daily intake of equal to or above 150 micrograms per day is classified as "adequate", while the iodine statuses of pregnant women taking iodine supplements at an average daily intake of less than 150 micrograms per day and those without supplemented iodine, as well as lactating women, are classified as "insufficient".

To review the local and overseas situation and scientific evidence, and to make recommendations for the local situation on the prevention of IDD, a Working Group on Prevention of Iodine Deficiency Disorders was set up by the DH and the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, with representatives from the Hospital Authority, the Hong Kong College of Community Medicine, the Hong Kong College of Family Physicians, the Hong Kong College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Hong Kong College of Paediatricians and the Hong Kong College of Physicians. The Working Group met on July 6, 2021, to review the latest scientific evidence, including the key findings of the survey. The following recommendations were made by the Working Group and will be promulgated to the general public and relevant health professionals:

- Health education on iodine intake among pregnant and lactating women should be strengthened;

- Joint recommendations on iodine intake for pregnant and lactating women should be made in collaboration with relevant parties (see Annex); and
- Based on the findings of sufficient iodine intake among school-aged children, a mandatory salt iodisation programme is not warranted in Hong Kong.

For access to the Report and more information, please visit www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/iodine_survey_report_en.pdf.