

# Scaling up investment in iodized salt and other nutrition interventions to improve child health and the economy in Kyrgyzstan



**Kyrgyzstan children will benefit from better access to iodized salt**

UNICEF, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 30 June 2011. Despite improvements in the past decade, 22 per cent of all deaths among children under-five in the Kyrgyz Republic are still caused by undernutrition, according to a report launched today. Besides the loss of lives, the burden of undernutrition in the Kyrgyz Republic is also substantial in economic terms, and is estimated to be US\$32 million annually. Scaling up nutrition interventions, including iodized salt coverage is therefore crucial to prevent loss of children's lives and is a strategic economic investment with high returns, according to the Situational

Analysis – Improving Economic Outcomes by Expanding Nutrition Programming in the Kyrgyz Republic. The report was released at a meeting jointly organized by the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and the World Bank.

“Undernutrition is a critical public health challenge, although it remains a hidden problem,” said Sabyrbek Djumabekov, Minister of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic. “The Government has already taken steps to reduce its direct causes. However, it is obvious that we need to initiate multi-sectoral programs and from

this perspective we are looking forward the recommendations made by this important report.”

“These children learn less, and they will earn less – deepening the cycle of poverty,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF’s Executive Director. “Investing in good nutrition is the smart, cost effective thing to do, helping to save more children’s lives and accelerate progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals with equity,” he added.

In Kyrgyzstan, three-quarters of the country’s salt is iodized and ten percent of wheat is fortified. But further effort is needed:

- Iodizing all salt sold will reduce iodine deficiency resulting in a US\$500,000 annual benefit due to increased worker productivity.
- Fortifying all of the country’s flour with iron, folic acid, and other B vitamins will improve the quality of the diet. The government’s efforts to fortify wheat flour as a public health intervention needs to be further supported.

“At least US\$6.2 million of the country’s economic losses from undernutrition can be prevented by scaling up existing nutrition programs in the Kyrgyz Republic,” said Tamer Rabie, a World Bank Senior Health Specialist. „Development partners need to capitalize on the successes achieved by the Government and assist it in its scaling up of programs such as salt iodization and flour fortification,” he added.

For the full report, please see: [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_59045.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_59045.html)  
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