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CAMPAIGN – Introduction 'could protect unborn babies'

# MP in acid additive plea

RACHEL DEVLIN News Reporter

**CITY MP Stewart Jackson today called on the Government to introduce the compulsory addition of folic acid into UK flour products to protect unborn babies.**

Deficiency in folic acid from three months before to 12 weeks after conception is a major risk factor for neural tube defects (NTD) in babies, the most common of which is spina bifida.

Mr Jackson took part in the Westminster Hall private members' debates on spina bifida and folic acid this morning.

He is backing the long-standing campaign by the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (Asbah), which is based in Park Road, central Peterborough, to have folic acid introduced to flour products.

There are an estimated 1,420 pregnancies in the UK affected by NTDs each year. Leading experts in spina bifida say that fortification of flour in the UK could prevent about 300 pregnancies a year from being affected.

Mr Jackson said: "There is a huge weight of scientific evidence that you can reduce the incidents of spina bifida with folic acid.

"This information has been in



**'EVIDENCE': MP Stewart Jackson.**

the public domain for 12 years and every Government during this time has refused to take action. In America, bread and flour products have been fortified with folic acid since 1998, and the result in this is a 70 per cent reduction in the number of incidents of neural tube defects.

"I want to bring an end to this lack of Government will, and raise this issue, so that families don't have to go through the heartache of having a loved child who is severely disabled. It is totally wrong that we are not doing all we can to prevent this condition and the pain it causes. I want to force the Government to look at fortifying bread with

## Spina bifida

**SPINA** bifida means split spine. The backbone usually provides a protective tube of bones with the nerves (spinal cord) running down the middle.

In spina bifida, the bones do not close round the spinal cord and the nerves can bulge out on the unborn baby's back and become damaged. This happens very early on in pregnancy – often before the woman even knows she is pregnant.

folic acid.

"The time for foot-dragging is over. The Government must commit taking real action in the next few months."

Peter Farrall, assistant director of marketing and communications at Asbah, said they were delighted Mr Jackson had highlighted the issue in the national arena.

He said: "We're grateful to Mr Jackson for bringing attention to this issue. We have been lobbying for many years on the issue of folic acid. America has seen a significant drop in neural tube affected pregnancies since introducing the fortification of flour products. In this country, 350 neural tube defect births could be prevented every year."

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