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PRESS RELEASE

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Background materials are available at:
<http://www.ifpri.org/media/20070723sprinkles.asp>

Nutritional Supplement Reduces Anemia by More than Half among Poor Children

Study Holds Major Potential for Food Aid Efforts in Developing Countries

WASHINGTON—A nutritional supplement known as Sprinkles, which can be added to children's food, reduces anemia by more than half, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*.

The study is the first to show that Sprinkles are effective in reducing anemia when included in an ongoing fortified food aid program implemented under challenging, real-life conditions in developing countries.

The research, conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Cornell University's Division of Nutritional Sciences, offers promising insights on how to reduce iron and other micronutrient deficiencies among poor people in developing countries.

Deficiencies in iron and other micronutrients are a devastating problem worldwide, causing poor health, premature death, and impaired development. Children aged six to 24 months are most vulnerable to suffering from iron-deficiency anemia.

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“Sprinkles are an effective and practical tool in reducing anemia among children,” said Marie Ruel, director of IFPRI's Food Consumption and Nutrition Division and a co-author of the study. “When combined with other food aid initiatives, the potential impact is huge.”

The findings are based on a study in rural Haiti, where at least two out of every three children under age three are anemic. Children in the study were enrolled in a food aid program that included cereals fortified with iron and other micronutrients. After Sprinkles, a dry powder containing iron and other vitamins and minerals, were added to their food for two months, anemia rates among the children were reduced from 54 to 24 percent, and further reduced to 14 percent seven months later. However, anemia rates remained unchanged for those children in the study who did not receive Sprinkles.

The study also found that fortified food aid alone is insufficient to prevent anemia in infants and young children, even if mothers are advised to complement the donated commodities with locally available, iron-rich foods. This could be due to the fact that foods, such as meat, are too expensive for families to buy on a daily basis and that donated foods are often shared among all family members rather than consumed only by the child.

“In poor settings like rural Haiti, food aid programs targeted to infants and young children should supplement their provision of standard iron-fortified foods with an additional nutritional supplement, such as Sprinkles, or they will fail to combat anemia adequately,” said Ruel.

According to the study, it is highly feasible to integrate Sprinkles distribution and education into existing food aid programs. Mothers participating in the study indicated that they would be willing to buy Sprinkles if sold in local markets because they believe it will benefit their children and prefer it to other nutrition interventions. World Vision-Haiti currently assists mothers with purchasing Sprinkles from Population Services International, a social marketing firm, which markets them in Haiti under the name “Babyfer.”

“Sprinkles are one of the most promising innovations in nutrition today,” said Purnima Menon, lead author of the study and research associate in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at Cornell University. “They offer an inexpensive option that mothers seem to love and children can consume easily.”

While the study took place in Haiti, its implications are global. Sprinkles have been tried in other developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Ghana, and Indonesia, and were found to be a very effective way to reduce micronutrient deficiencies

Collaborators on the study include World Vision-Haiti, Micronutrient Initiative, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) Project, managed by the Academy for Educational Development.

“Sprinkles hold the potential to dramatically reduce anemia, which undermines the livelihoods of children across the developing world,” said Ruel.

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The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations. www.ifpri.org

The Division of Nutritional Sciences (DNS) at Cornell University is among the largest academic units in the United States devoted to human nutrition. It combines expertise in molecular biology, genetics, metabolism, physiology, community nutrition, international nutrition, and food policy. www.human.cornell.edu