Summary

It is estimated that 190 million preschool infants and children are affected by vitamin A deficiency and 293 million children in the same age group have anaemia. Member States have requested guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) on the effects and safety of the use of multiple micronutrient powders for home fortification of foods consumed by infants and children 6–23 months of age in support of their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

WHO has developed the present evidence-informed recommendations using the procedures outlined in the *WHO handbook for guideline development*. The steps in this process included: (i) identification of priority questions and outcomes; (ii) retrieval of the evidence; (iii) assessment and synthesis of the evidence; (iv) formulation of recommendations, including research priorities; and (v) planning for dissemination, implementation, impact evaluation and updating of the guideline. The Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) methodology was used to prepare evidence profiles related to preselected topics, based on up-to-date systematic reviews.

The guideline development group for nutrition interventions, the Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group (NUGAG), comprises content experts, methodologists, representatives of potential stakeholders, and consumers. These experts participated in several WHO technical consultations concerning this guideline, held in Geneva, Switzerland, and Amman, Jordan, in 2010 and 2011. Members of the External Experts and Stakeholders Panel were identified through a public call for comments, and the panel was involved throughout the guideline development process. NUGAG members voted on the strength of the recommendation, taking into consideration: (i) desirable and undesirable effects of the intervention; (ii) the quality of the available evidence; (iii) values and preferences related to the intervention in different settings; and (iv) the cost of options available to health-care workers in different settings. All NUGAG members completed a Declaration of Interests Form before each meeting.

Home fortification of foods with micronutrient powders containing at least iron, vitamin A and zinc is recommended to improve iron status and reduce anaemia among infants and children 6–23 months of age (strong recommendation). The overall quality of the evidence for iron deficiency was found to be high, whereas for anaemia, haemoglobin concentration, iron status and growth it was moderate. Ideally, interventions with multiple micronutrient powders should be implemented as part of a national infant and young child feeding programme.

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1 A WHO guideline is any document, whatever its title, containing WHO recommendations about health interventions, whether they be clinical, public health or policy interventions. A recommendation provides information about what policy-makers, health-care providers or patients should do. It implies a choice between different interventions that have an impact on health and that have ramifications for the use of resources. All publications containing WHO recommendations are approved by the WHO Guidelines Review Committee.