THE MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCY INFORMATION SYSTEM

The Micronutrient Deficiency Information System (MDIS) was established in 1991 in the Nutrition unit of the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Community Systems Foundation of Ann Arbor, Michigan. The MDIS is a global surveillance mechanism for continually assessing the magnitude and distribution of deficiencies in three major micronutrients: iodine, vitamin A and iron. The databases provide the information required both to estimate the prevalence of these forms of micronutrient malnutrition on a national and global scale, and to provide timely and direct support for implementing and monitoring related prevention and control programmes.

Information is based on clinical indicators and selected biochemical and ecological parameters; it has been gathered from scientific journals, government documents, conference reports, and unpublished papers. To facilitate interpretation, every effort is made to specify the methods used in collecting and analysing information. Whenever possible, data are presented in tabular form stratified by administrative region, age, sex and nutrient status. On this basis, national "at-risk" and "affected" populations have been calculated. This degree of detail is provided in support of continuing efforts to standardize methodologies for assessing population-based deficiency rates. It is hoped that this will lead eventually both to improved monitoring of control activities and a better understanding of their impact within countries.

This is the second in the MDIS working paper series, available data on global prevalence of iodine deficiency disorders having been presented in 1993. A third report is in preparation, on the global prevalence of iron deficiency anaemia in children. Although previous efforts have been made to document the worldwide magnitude and distribution of micronutrient deficiencies, the MDIS is the most systematic and comprehensive approach developed thus far to providing robust epidemiological prevalence estimates of deficiencies of these three important micronutrients.

Because of the dynamic nature of global micronutrient malnutrition, WHO expects to update periodically this and other documents in the MDIS working paper series. Readers are urged to provide any missing information so that current estimates may be revised.