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HUNDREDS OF **BIRTH DEFECTS** DUE TO LACK OF **FOLIC ACID'**  
  
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MORE than 2,000 babies have died or been born disabled because of ministers' refusal to adopt nutritional advice on **folic acid**, experts claim.

Scientists have repeatedly advised the Government to ensure food firms add **folic acid** to **flour**, a measure they say reduces the risk of babies being born with major defects such as spina bifida.

However ministers have stalled on implementing the guidance - and researchers now say serious problems in some 2,014 pregnancies over 14 years could have been avoided if they had.

Experts from six universities - including Oxford - along with Public Health England and Public Health Wales, believe there would have been around a 21 per cent drop in cases of serious defects in pregnancy if the UK had made fortifying **flour** mandatory in 1998, the same as the US.

Official figures show that 85 per cent of British women aged 16 to 49 have low **folic acid** levels. The B vitamin has several important functions, including the formation of red blood cells.

Writing in the journal Archives of Disease in Childhood, the authors said: In the USA, following the introduction of mandatory fortification of **flour**, there was an approximate 23 per cent reduction in affected births.

The failure of Britain to fortify **flour** with **folic acid** has had significant consequences.'

Experts on the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition wrote to ministers in October expressing concern that **folic acid** proposals made in 2000, 2006 and 2009 had not been adopted.

A Department of Health spokesman said the recommendations put forward in October are currently being considered'.