**By NICK MCDERMOTT, Health Editor**

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Folic acid should be added to bread and flour to save babies from birth defects

Profs warn pregnant women dangerously low on B vitamin

**MORE than 2,000 babies have suffered birth defects because ministers have failed to add folic acid to bread, a study claims.**

Scientists have been urging the Government to fortify flour with the B vitamin since the late 1990s.

They warn 85 per cent of mums-to-be have dangerously low levels, increasing their tot’s risk of neural tube problems such as spina bifida. And less than a third of pregnant women take supplements.

Experts estimate 2,014 cases of babies with birth defects could have been avoided since 1998 if Britain had followed the example of 78 other countries.

The new study’s lead researcher Prof Joan Morris, of London’s Queen Mary University, said fortifying flour was “remarkably safe”. In the US, the policy had led to a 23 per cent reduction in neural tube defects.

Prof Morris likened the UK “public health failure” to the 1960s thalidomide birth defects scandal. Nutrition experts last month urged ministers to add folic acid to bread and flour.