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BRIGHT STUDENTS USE IODIZED SALT

Dilnoza* is 14 years old and a student in the 9th group of the 16th school in Tashkent. She is a good and industrious student and since she particularly loves to play the piano, she is the best student in her piano class.

Dilnoza has a sister aged 16 and two younger brothers of 8 and 5 years old. Dilnoza is lucky. Her mother loves to cook and always prepares good and healthy meal for her family. She puts a lot of effort everyday into preparing varied meals with a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables.



However, Dilnoza suffers from goitre. For a long time, she did not even know about it, but it was detected 6 years ago in a routine examination by the doctor. When her mother heard this, she immediately started to find out what she could do about it. A few days later, she started to use iodized salt and has always used it ever since. This is probably why Dilnoza's 5 year old brother Akmal is the only one in her family, who does not suffer from goitre.



Demonstration in decorated hall

So when Dilnoza heard about the campaign that was going to be carried out in grades 5-11 of all schools of Uzbekistan on the 16th of December, she already knew that lack of iodine can cause goitre and that it could be prevented by using iodized salt. What she did not yet know and what she found out about in the activities around this day, was that iodine is also very important in the development of the brain, and that pregnant mothers should use iodized salt to give their babies the brightest start in life.

On the 16th of December, the school was buzzing with activity. But already weeks before that, the preparations had started: the hallway was decorated with beautifully painted pictures and all children had rehearsed drama pieces and role plays about iodine, iodized salt and vitamins and minerals in general.



Testing the salt



Iodine in salt: a blue spot

The dramas showed mothers visiting a doctor with their children, followed by an explanation from the doctor on the use of iodized salt; and children who performed very well in the classroom as a result of their mothers using

* Names and places in the story have been changed to protect the privacy of all involved

iodized salt during pregnancy and giving only iodized salt to the child afterwards. The day before the big event, all children were asked to bring some salt from their homes, which they would test the next day with test kits provided by UNICEF. Before taking the salt to school, Dilnoza once again made sure that her mother had bought iodized salt! On the day itself, a demonstration was held in the central hall to show the children how to use the iodine test kits. They should put a drop of the fluid on the salt; if the salt contained iodine, this drop would turn dark blue. At last it was Dilnoza's turn to perform the test. When the spot turned blue after testing, she uttered a sigh of relief. Even though she had read on the salt packet that the salt was iodized, she could only believe it after she saw the result of the test with her own eyes.



Role play on vitamins and minerals

After the test there was a health lesson dedicated to the effects of iodine deficiency disorders and how only the use of iodized salt can prevent such problems. The teacher told them once again, how important iodine in iodized salt is for intelligence and that a baby might lose 15 IQ points if the pregnant mother does not use iodized salt.



Dilnoza played a major role in one of the dramas for which she received a round of applause. After the lesson Dilnoza wondered, why babies were still born with IDD and why people still suffered from goitre, when the solution was so simple: just use iodized salt! Surely everybody could understand that.

What she would like most of all now, was to have an iodine test kit for herself, to make sure every time that the salt her mother brings home is iodized. Because she wants herself and her brothers and

sister to be the brightest children in the world!

RESULTS OF MONITORING AFTER THE SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

In every grade where the iodine test was performed, teachers completed a simple monitoring form, providing details of the number of pupils that participated on the day and the result of the test: how many salt samples contained iodine and how many did not. The results were collected and compiled by the Ministry of Public Education.

On the testing day, about 6 million children participated and results varied per oblast. On average, about 55% of the salt was iodized; in Tashkent city, the results were most promising, since 97% of the salt appeared to be iodized. In the oblasts, the levels varied between 33% (Navoi) and 88% (Surkhandarya).

Comparing with the results of the last official survey (MICS 2000), it was clear that a lot of progress had been made, with the percentage of salt iodized at household level

rising from 19% to 55% at the end of 2003. However, this still leaves a figure of 45% remaining in order to achieve Universal Salt Iodization by 2005.

Delegates of the Children's Parliament "Young Generation" also took part in the national school campaign. They advertised the event beforehand and interviewed pupils on their knowledge and awareness on IDD. After the event, they sent an open letter to the government, urging them to take control of the production of only iodized salt, stating that "an adequate iodine content in salt is a pledge for the health of youth".

Let us join together to get the support of all schoolchildren in Uzbekistan in order to have all salt iodized in Uzbekistan as soon as possible. By doing so, we can help to protect the brains of unborn babies and create a bright future for all children.

Percentage of Iodized Salt

