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# **ASBAH's Campaign for compulsory Flour Fortification with Folic Acid in the UK**

**Andrew Russell**  
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[www.asbah.org](http://www.asbah.org)

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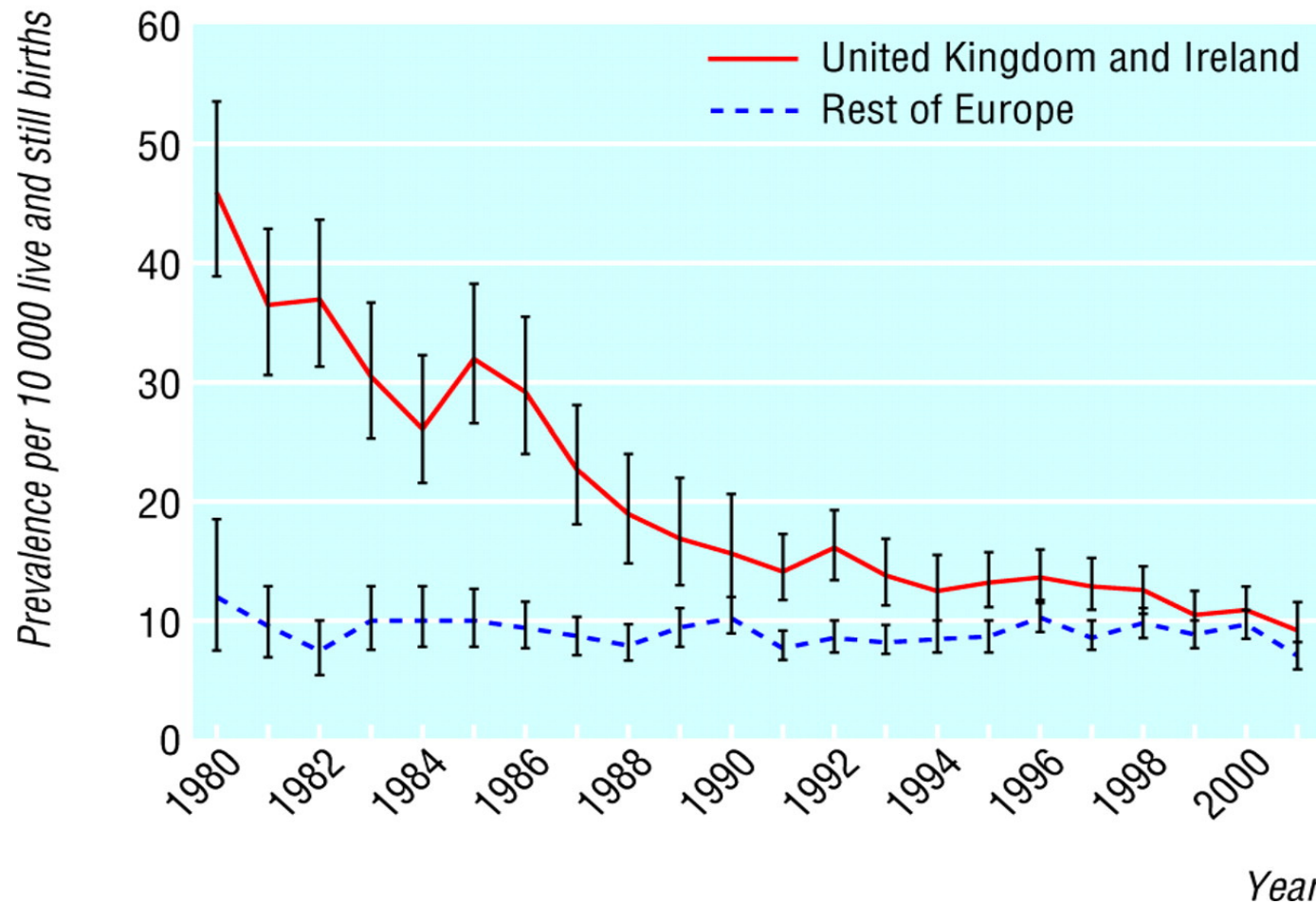


association for  
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# Prevalence of neural tube defects in the United Kingdom and Ireland and in other European countries, 1980-2001,\*



\*adjusted for registry  
 (prevalence = total neural tube defect cases (live births + fetal deaths from 20 weeks' gestation (including stillbirths) + terminations of pregnancy)/(total live births + stillbirths))

- **FA must be taken before conception**
- **True incidence disguised by TOPs**
- **Mandatory fortification practical & safe**
- **Would benefit underprivileged women particularly**
- **Fortification & supplementation go together for optimum benefit**
- **No evidence of harm; growing evidence of health benefits**

# Pregnant women's knowledge of folic acid

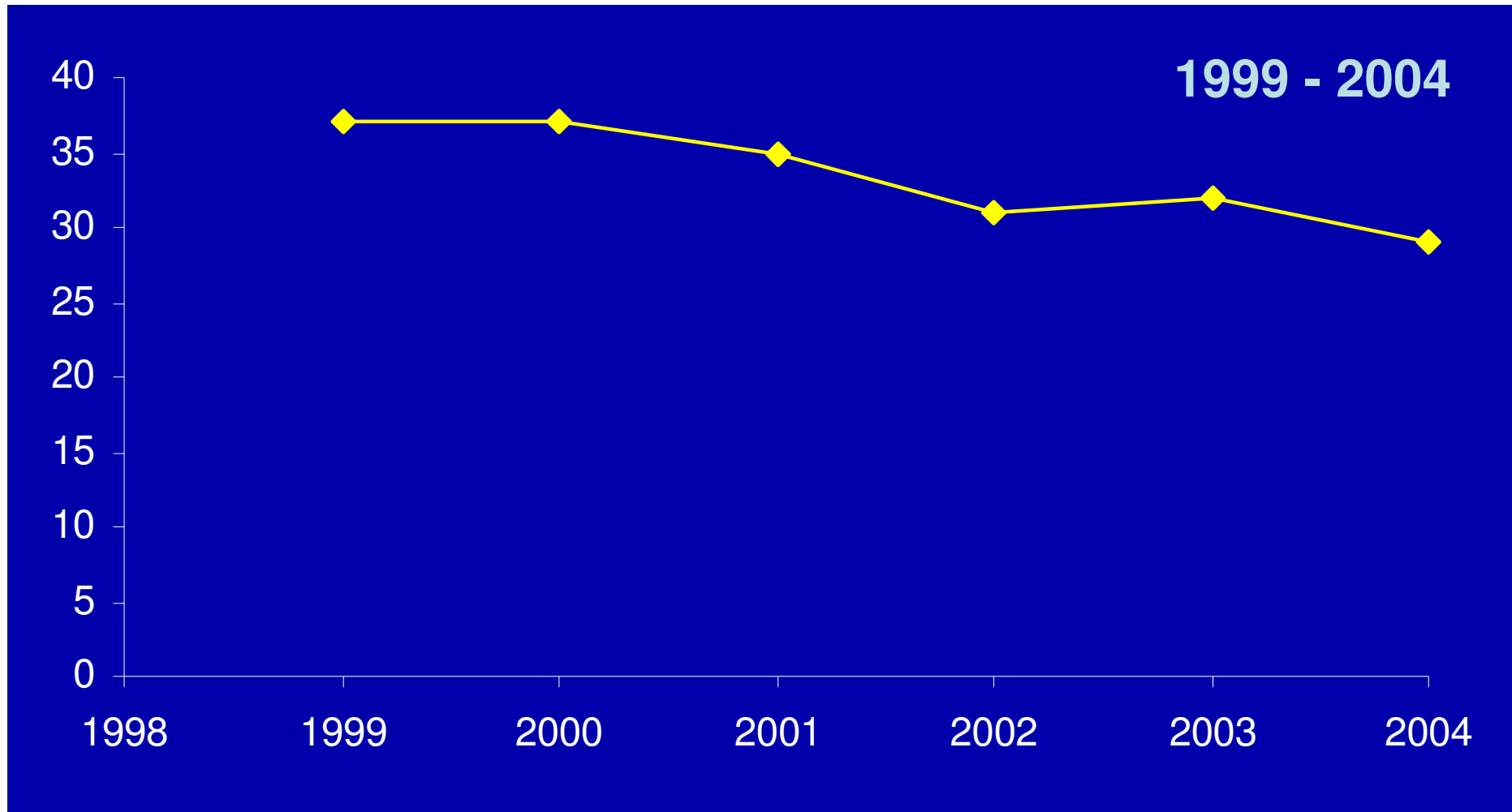


- **76% knew correct time to supplement**
- **45% took supplement at correct time**

***“Low socio-economic status, age less than 30 years, lower educational status and unplanned pregnancy were high risk factors for not taking folic acid”***

(Sen et al, 2000, Maternal knowledge, attitude & practice regarding folic acid intake during the periconceptual period)

# Percentage of women who took Folic Acid before pregnancy



Source: Prof. N. Wald FRCS, Personal Communication

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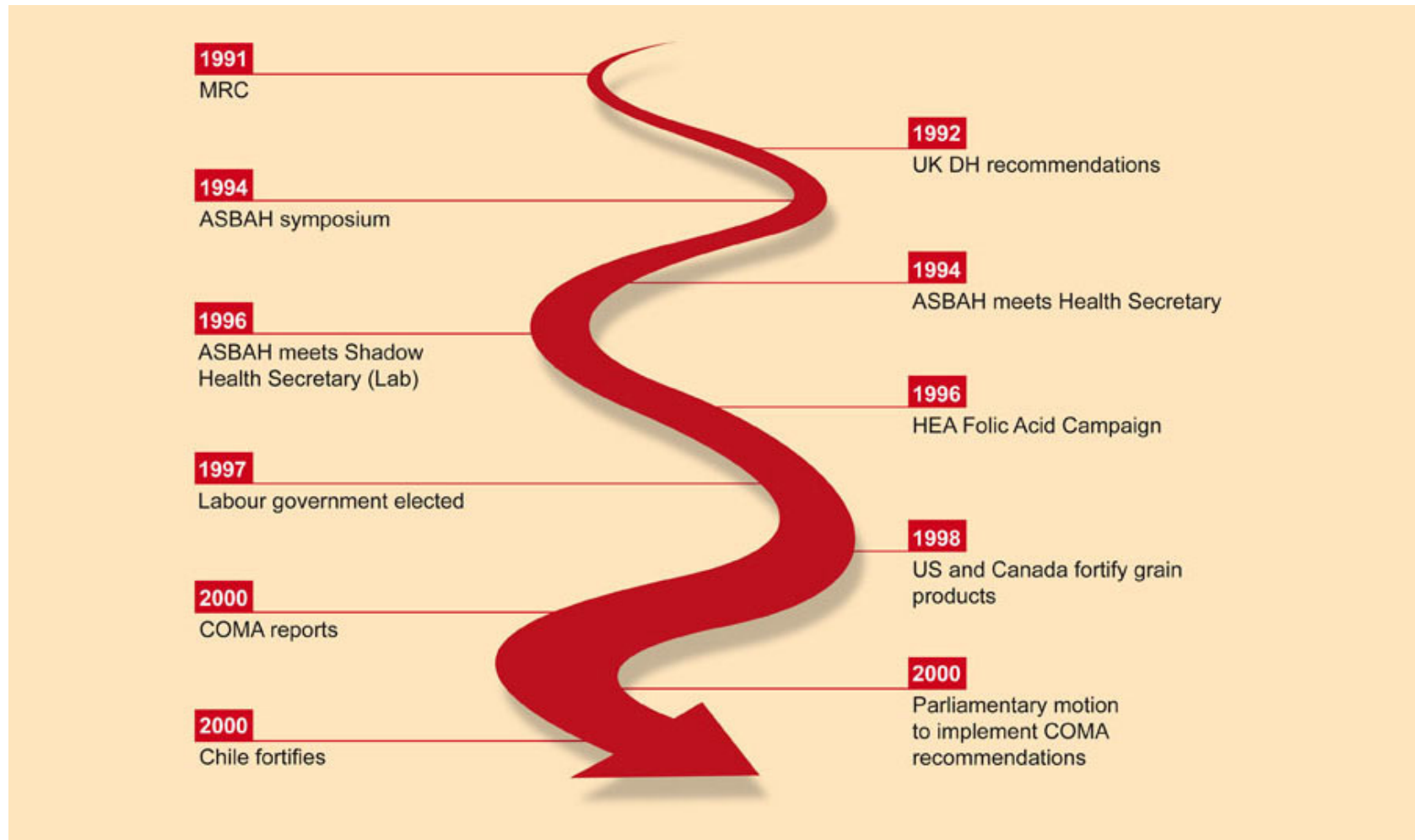
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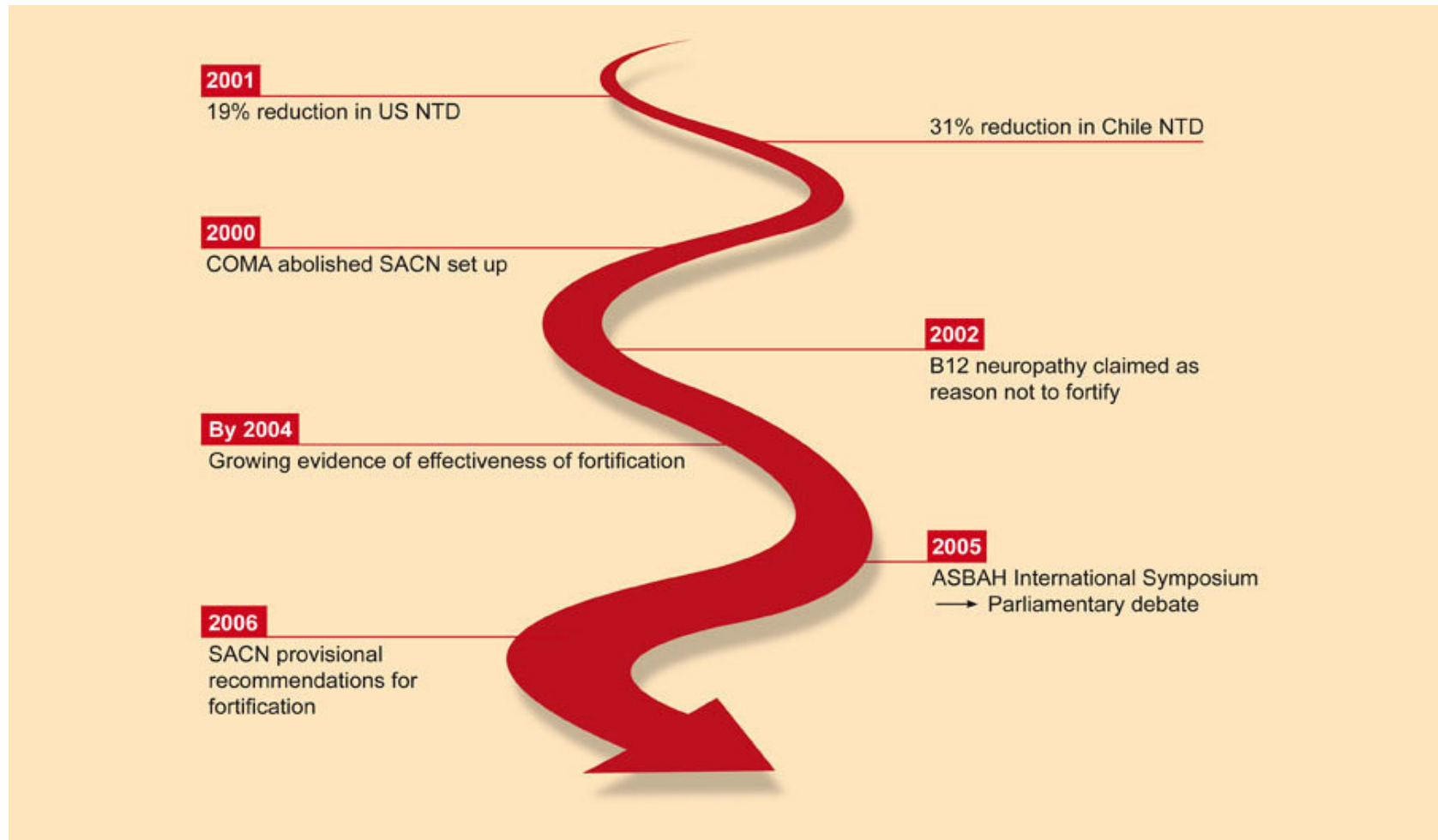
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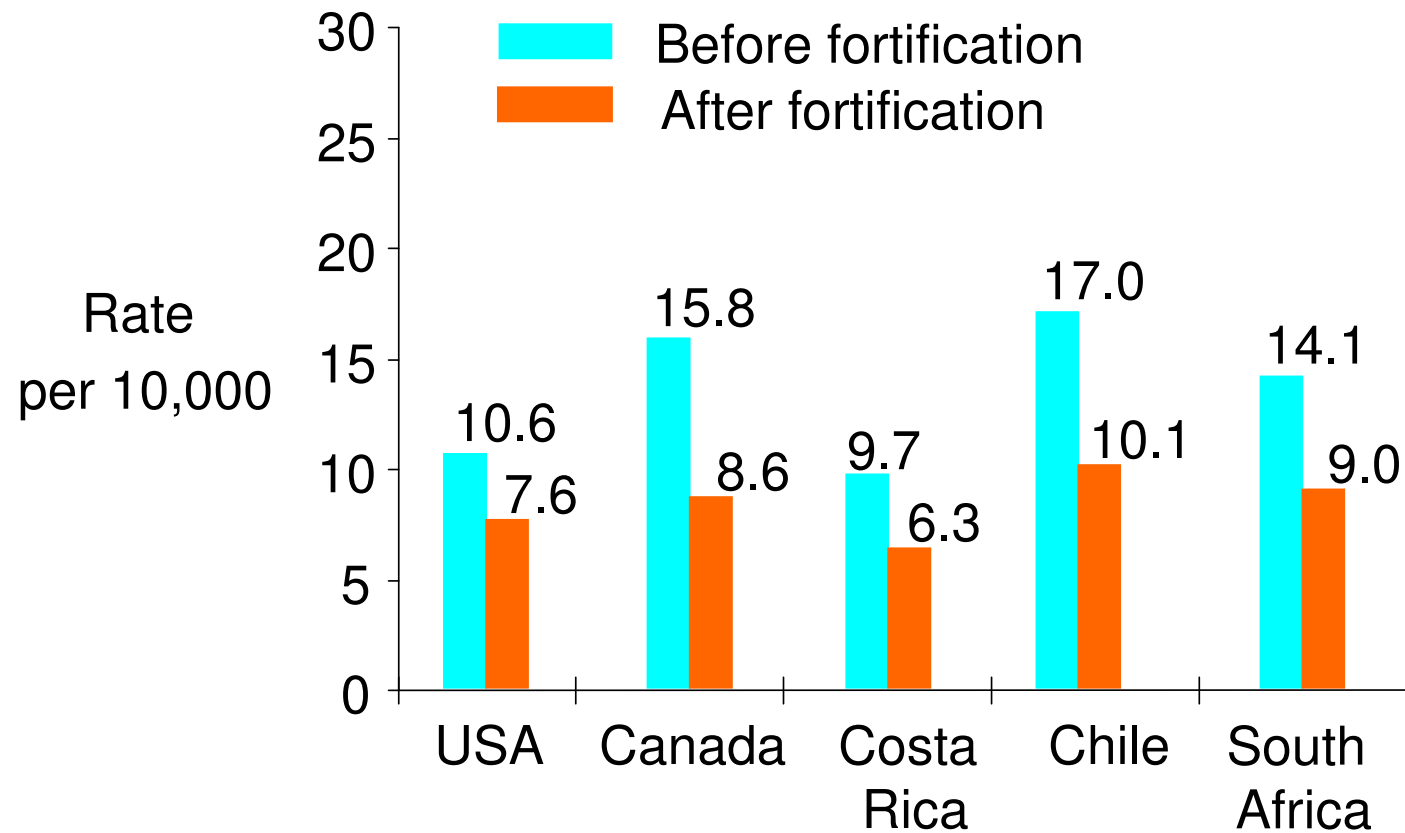
# What are the opposing forces to our campaign?



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- **Advocates of ‘pure food’**
- **Ideological libertarians**
- **Government low priority**
- **Media scares**

# Selected worldwide NTD prevalence changes before and after folic acid fortification



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## **Cole et al: Folic acid for the prevention of colorectal adenomas, a randomised clinical trial**

**JAMA 2007**

- **Adenomas not carcinomas;**
- **1mg FA/day neither reduced nor increased risk**

## Colorectal Cancer

**Mason et al: A temporal association between folic acid fortification and an increase in colorectal cancer rates.**

Cancer Epidem Biomarkers 2007

- **claimed that FA fortification (1998) may have caused rise in colorectal cancer (1995);**
- **Rise preceded fortification;**
- **Endoscopic screening 30% in 1996, 50% in 2002;**
- **Cancer screening always gives an increased incidence;**
- **Death rate reduced**

## **Prediagnostic plasma folate and the risk of death in patients with colorectal cancer.**

B.M.Wolpin et al - Journal of Clinical Oncology, 2008

- **Large cohort prospective study**
- **Higher plasma folate not associated with increased risk of CRC or mortality**
- **Inverse relationship between plasma folate and CRC**
- **30% - 40% reduction in CRC for those with high levels of folate intake**

## The UK Position Now

- **Food Standards Agency recommends fortification;**
- **Government requires more evidence on colorectal cancer;**
- **Delay until mid-2009**

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