

# Himachal plans to distribute fortified wheat flour via PDS from Sep

By Sampad Nandy

NEW DELHI – Himachal Pradesh plans to start distributing fortified wheat flour through public distribution system from September, a senior official with the state food and supplies department said.

The Centre will separately roll out a scheme to distribute fortified rice through public distribution system and the pilot project in 15 districts across the country will run for three years. This scheme is part of the government's 100 days' agenda.

According to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, both fortified rice and wheat flour should be supplemented with iron, vitamin B12 and folic acid.

Himachal Pradesh will distribute fortified wheat flour instead of rice through public distribution system. "We will not distribute fortified rice through PDS as most of the state's population is wheat consuming and also the cost of distributing fortified rice will not be economic for us," he said.

Distributing fortified rice is expensive for the state as it does not have adequate milling capacity, the official said.

"We will either have to get rice milled from Punjab or Uttar Pradesh and that will increase the cost of fortified rice," he said. For rice fortification and distribution, the Centre will bear the 90% of the cost for hilly states. Even with the centre bearing almost the entire cost, the rest will put a huge pressure on the state's exchequer, the official said. According to the official, if the state distributes fortified rice it will cost about 13 rupees per kg, while fortified wheat flour will cost about 5 rupees per kg. According to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, fortified wheat flour, rice has to be milled with iron, vitamin B12 and folic acid, milk and edible oil with vitamins A and D, and double-fortified salt with iodine and iron. "We have obtained Food Safety and Standards Authority of India approval. It is up to the state choose among the five items allowed by the Centre," he said.

The idea to distribute fortified grains and staples is to reduce the malnutrition and states can distribute any item they want to, he said.