

News from MCAI Newsletter 2003

At least 20,000 pregnancies a year in Albania are at risk from iodine deficiency.

This means that the babies will likely end up dead or with an IQ loss of 20 points. This can be prevented by giving the Mum two iodine capsules **costing just 31p**.

Plans to provide children with iodine by adding it to salt continue following the survey in April which produced clear evidence that this is a serious problem and the resultant incidence of mental disability will continue to rise in Albania if nothing is done.

We have proved that severe iodine deficiency exists in more than 90% of 8-12 year old school children living in the hills of southern Albania. Following MCAI's survey in April, the results were delivered to the Albanian Government and now there is a national programme of salt iodisation but this will only become effective over a number of years.

Meanwhile vast numbers of children and women of childbearing age are affected, this leads to a drop of 20 points in the population IQ, and to fetal and neonatal loss. We wish to study the problem further in 10 to 12 year old children and then embark on an urgent iodine replacement programme using iodised oil capsules.



Dr Janet Hislop and Anne Corbett, a speech and language therapist, visited Albania recently as part of a series of visits investigating the provision in Albania. Said Dr Hislop:

"We identified 2 children that seemed to be profoundly deaf, and more importantly we identified the need for training in methods of hearing testing in young children. The more difficult problem for Albania will be the provision of hearing aids to identified children, because of the cost as well as the expertise needed.

We also met one child who had athetoid cerebral palsy and was deaf because of kernicterus, which we were assured could be prevented in Albania if the birth attendants were aware of the need."

News from MCAI Newsletter 2004

"We expected warmth, but our visit coincided with the coldest wettest May on record. Some of the main roads have better surfaces now which led to faster and more dangerous driving. Myrteza our driver kept us safe (just). In the rural areas the severe poverty does not change."
(Dr John Bridson on his return from a recent visit to Albania).

Albania is an iodine deficient country which leads to a variety of problems including a general significant lowering of ability of a population in the worst hit areas.

MCAI's intention is to find out whether a dose of iodine given to iodine deficient children improves their performance. Also to train testers for our next study and to evaluate the tests we wanted to use.

When the study is complete it is MCAI's intention to try to help and encourage the local professionals in their attempts to eradicate the problem.

✚ Read 'Severe Iodine Deficiency in Southern Albania'
Zimmermann M B, Bridson J, Bozo M, Grimici L, Selimaj V, Tanner M S.
Int. J. Vitam. Nutr. Res. 73 (5), July 2003 © Hogrefe & Huber Publishers

