

Global Trans Fat Elimination: Launch of WHO's 2020 Progress Report

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Substantial progress has been made on the removal of harmful [trans fat](#) [1] from food: 58 countries have introduced laws to date that will protect more than 3 billion people from the toxic fat by end of 2021. However, more than 100 countries have yet to act to eliminate trans fat from their national food supply and make the world trans fat free by 2023. To recognise countries who achieve [trans fat elimination](#) [1], the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a certification scheme.

In collaboration with Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative by Vital Strategies, the [WHO launched their second Progress Report on Global Trans Fat Elimination 2020](#) [2] on 9 September 2020 in a virtual event attended by over 300 people.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's Director-General, opened the launch event reminding the audience that the leading cause of deaths in the world, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), has not disappeared despite the current focus on containing the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the prevention of NCDs through interventions such as trans fat elimination will benefit governments by reducing the burden to the healthcare system which is already under strain due to the ongoing pandemic.

Dr Tedros announced that WHO will develop a **certification scheme to recognise countries that achieve the elimination of industrially produced trans fats**. Similar to WHO's lead in eradicating smallpox and polio, WHO is set to eliminate an NCD risk factor for the first time.

"Some may think we need to slow our efforts on trans fat elimination and focus on Covid-19. In truth, prevention is more important than ever. Trans fat elimination prevents heart attacks, and as such reduces the burden on healthcare facilities." Dr Tom Frieden, President and CEO, Resolve to Save Lives

WHO started tracking Member States' policy actions to remove trans fat from their food supply two years ago. Dr Chizuru Nishida, WHO's Unit Head for Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Diets at the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety presented this year's findings.

The report shows that countries increasingly adopt best practice policies which consist of setting a compulsory limit for industrially produced trans fats to 2% of oils and fats in all foods and/or banning partially hydrogenated oils (PHO), the

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source of industrially produced trans fats. To date, 58 countries have introduced laws to protect their populations from trans fat – 100 have yet to act. Out of the 15 countries with the highest number of deaths from coronary heart disease (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Latvia, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, USA), only four have introduced regulations since 2017 (Canada, Latvia, Slovenia, USA).

In addition to national action, regional approaches to trans fat elimination have also seen progress. In 2019, the European Union introduced a 2% limit for trans fat, and all Member States of the Pan American Health Organization (WHO Americas region) unanimously approved a [Regional Plan of Action to Eliminate Industrially Produced Trans-Fatty Acids 2020-2025](#) [3]. They follow the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Eurasian Economic Union who both introduced regional regulation in 2015.

However, protection from industrially produced trans fat is unequally distributed: most laws have been adopted in high-income or upper-middle-income countries in Europe and the Americas. No low-income or lower-middle-income country has acted to date, resulting in geographic and socio-economic disparities.

About trans fats

Industrially produced trans fats increase the risk for heart disease and are estimated to cause more than 500,000 deaths per year. They are found in hardened vegetable fats (e.g., margarine and vegetable ghee), baked goods, fried foods, and many snack foods. WHO recommends that trans fat intake does not exceed 1% of total daily energy intake, which translates to less than 2.2 g/day in a 2,000-calorie diet.

Healthier fats and oils can be used to replace trans fats without affecting the taste or cost of food. To support Member States in eliminating this harmful substance, WHO launched the [REPLACE action package](#) [4] in May 2018, providing governments with a practical, evidence-based tools to implement actions on iTFA across six strategic areas.

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