

WHO awards 5 countries for progress in eliminating trans fats for first time

02 February 2024 | News

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WHO has awarded its first-ever certificates validating progress in eliminating industrially produced trans fatty acids to five countries. Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand have each demonstrated they have the best practice policy for industrially produced trans-fatty acids (iTFA) elimination in effect, supported by adequate monitoring and enforcement systems. WHO also released results from the first five years of its REPLACE initiative to eliminate iTFA.

While the ambitious target set by WHO in 2018 to fully eliminate iTFA from the global food supply by the end of 2023 was not met, remarkable progress has been made towards this goal in every region of the world. In 2023 alone, new best-practice policies became effective in 7 countries (Egypt, Mexico, Moldova, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Philippines, and Ukraine).

Trans-fatty acids (TFA) are semisolid to solid fats that occur in two forms: industrially produced and naturally occurring. Intake of TFA is associated with an increased risk of heart attacks and death from heart disease. TFA has no known health benefits, and foods high in iTFA (e.g. fried foods, cakes and ready meals) are often high in sugar, fat and salt.

A total of 53 countries have now best practice policies in effect for tackling iTFA in food, vastly improving the food environment for 3.7 billion people, or 46 per cent of the world's population, as compared to 6 per cent just 5 years ago. These policies are expected to save approximately 183,000 lives a year.

"Trans fat has no known health benefit, but huge health risks," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "We are very pleased that many countries have introduced policies banning or limiting trans fat in food. But

introducing a policy is one thing; implementing it is another. I congratulate Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia and Thailand, who are leading the world in monitoring and enforcing their trans fat policies. We urge other countries to follow their lead.â?•

Accelerating efforts to achieve best-practice policies in just 8 countries with the highest needs would eliminate 90 per cent of the global iTFA burden, representing a unique opportunity to see in our lifetime a world free from deaths attributable to iTFA.

The WHO validation programme for iTFA elimination recognises those countries which went beyond introducing best practice policies by ensuring rigorous monitoring and enforcement systems in place. Monitoring and enforcing compliance with policies is critical to maximising and sustaining the health benefits of iTFA elimination.