



Regional Regulations

Scaling Up Health Benefits of Trans Fat Elimination

Trans fat is an artificial compound still used in some countries as a substitute for butter or lard in fried food, deep-fried food, baked goods, and spreads. It clogs arteries and leads to heart attacks. Globally, artificial trans fat was estimated to cause more than half a million deaths every year. It can be eliminated and replaced with healthier alternatives, and many governments have already successfully protected their people. But trans fat regulations, and their proven health benefits, have largely been concentrated in wealthy countries. Because all people, in all countries, must be protected from the risks of trans fat consumption, the World Health Organization's REPLACE initiative (<https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/replace-transfat/>) aims to eliminate artificial trans fat from the global food supply by 2023.

Eliminating trans fat can save more than 17 million lives, and effective regional regulations will help the world reach this milestone faster

Completely eliminating artificial trans fat from the global food supply would save 17.4 million lives over the next 25 years¹, but this requires *all* countries to take regulatory action to protect their populations. Regional body² regulations are an effective tool for extending trans fat protection to countries with limited resources or regulatory capacity, and where trans fat elimination is not yet a priority.



- **REGIONAL POLICIES PROTECT MORE PEOPLE AND REQUIRE LESS INVESTMENT FROM INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES.** Regional policies apply to all member states within a regional body, providing more health gains than national-level policies alone. Regional bodies may support enforcement of regulations, ensuring proper implementation and reducing the enforcement burden on individual member states. Regional policies have already accelerated population coverage: three existing regional policies—in the Eurasian Economic Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union— can potentially reach 41 countries and protect more than 700 million people.



- **REGIONAL REGULATIONS REDUCE DISPARITIES WITHIN THE REGION.** Prioritizing country-level regulations over regional action can put consumers in lower-resource countries at higher risk. Before the European Union enacted trans fat regulations, Eastern European countries without policies had much higher levels of trans fat than wealthier Western European countries with trans fat elimination policies in place.



- **REGIONAL REGULATIONS REDUCE BARRIERS TO INDUSTRY COMPLIANCE.** When an entire region adopts the same regulatory structure for trans fat, food manufacturers can reformulate products in the same way for sale in multiple countries. This can reduce R&D costs and allow for easier trade within the region.



- **TRADE INCENTIVES EXTEND HEALTH BENEFITS EVEN BEYOND REGULATED AREAS.** Companies that eliminate artificial trans fats from products for regulated markets may also have economic incentives to sell trans fat-free formulations in nearby unregulated markets. Food producers in unregulated regions will be incentivized to reformulate their products so they can export their products into regulated regions.

Pathways to Regional Regulation

BEST PRACTICE REGULATIONS

To maximize health benefits, regional regulations should be directly binding in all member states and align with WHO's recommended best practice policy options:

1. Mandatory limit of industrially-produced trans fat to 2 grams/100 grams of total fat in all foods
2. Mandatory ban on the production and use of partially-hydrogenated oils in all foods

Eurasian Economic Union and European Union have all approved mandatory trans fat limits directly binding in member states.

LESS RESTRICTIVE REGULATIONS

Non-binding or less restrictive policy options are less effective, but still have the potential for widespread health benefits by developing frameworks for further action. Gulf Cooperation Council has set trans fat limits as a standard that individual member states must approve and implement. Latin American countries have signed on to Pan American Health Organization's "Trans Fat Free Americas" initiative with a regional Plan of Action under development.

¹ Kontis V, Cobb LK et al. "Three Public Health Interventions Could Save 94 Million Lives in 25 Years Global Impact Assessment Analysis." *Circulation*, www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.118.038160.

² "Regional body" refers to trade blocs or other bodies with power to issue regulations that directly bind member states.