



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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Commissioner

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Stephen Ostroff, MD
Acting Commissioner
United States Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Dr. Ostroff:

I am writing on behalf of the undersigned health authorities and organizations to urge the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to release guidelines to encourage food makers to lower sodium in products sold in the United States (US). This letter echoes a call for the FDA to take action on sodium that was made by over 30 partners of the National Salt Reduction Initiative in October, 2014.¹

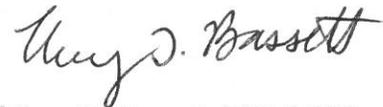
High sodium intake is dangerous to the public's health. It leads to high blood pressure and greater risk of heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the US. Nearly one-third of adults in the US have high blood pressure, but rates vary by age, race, and ethnicity. For example, African American adults and adults over the age of 55 experience disproportionately high rates of hypertension.² Americans' average intake of over 3,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day far exceeds the recommended limit of 2,300 mg set by the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The benefits of lowering sodium intake are difficult for individuals to attain because nearly 80% of sodium consumed comes from processed food, such as packaged, restaurant, and prepared food. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee³ called for a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to reduce sodium in food that includes partnerships between government and industry, consistent with the Institute of Medicine's 2010 recommendation to establish standards for sodium in foods.⁴

The National Salt Reduction Initiative (NSRI) is a partnership of 100 state and local health departments and organizations committed to sodium reduction in the food supply.⁵ The NSRI partnership engaged the food industry and nearly 30 food companies pledged to reduce sodium by voluntarily committing to sodium reduction targets; most met their 2012 commitments.⁶ New York City's recently adopted sodium warning rule requires chain restaurants to identify menu items that

contain more than the daily recommended limit of sodium. The United States Department of Agriculture is implementing step-wise sodium reductions in the nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. The FDA's Foods and Veterinary Medicine Program Strategic Plan 2012-2016 cites a goal to "reduce sodium content in the food supply," but action has not yet been taken.⁷ We applaud federal agencies and industry leaders for their commitment to ensuring the availability of products with lower amounts of sodium, but further federal action is needed to level the playing field for companies already successfully selling products with less sodium.

Scientific evidence overwhelmingly indicates the adverse health risks of high sodium intake, and the health and financial benefits of reducing population sodium intake are clear. Still, the ubiquity of high sodium products in our food supply makes it nearly impossible for most of our population to stay within recommended daily limits. The undersigned reiterate the call made a year ago, and urge the FDA to set gradual sodium reduction targets for packaged and restaurant food. By taking meaningful steps to encourage companies to reduce sodium density in the food supply, the FDA can help lower population sodium intake, thus helping to reduce hypertension and its associated complications.

Sincerely,



Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Signatories

American Heart Association
Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
California Department of Public Health
Cambridge Public Health Department
Chicago Department of Public Health
City of St. Louis Department of Health
Connecticut Department of Public Health
Cook County Department of Public Health
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Health Power for Minorities (Health Power)
Kaiser Permanente
Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
Maricopa County Department of Public Health
Minneapolis Health Department
Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Kidney Foundation
National Network of Public Health Institutes
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Northwest Kidney Centers

Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
Public Health Institute
Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law
Salt Lake County Health Department
Society for the Analysis of African-American Public Health Issues
Southern Nevada Health District
Texas Medical Association
Washington State Department of Health
Arkansas Department of Health
New York State Department of Health

¹ Letter to The Honorable Sylvia Burwell, Secretary, United States Department of Health & Human Services. October 8, 2015.
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/sodium-ltr.pdf>

² Mozzafarian D, et al. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics-2015 Update: A Report for the American Heart Association.
Circulation. 2015; 131:00-00.

³ 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee to the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA). February 2015.

⁴ IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2010. Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intake in the United States. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁵ NSRI Partners: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/nsri-partners.pdf>

⁶ NSRI Corporate Commitments: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/nsri-corporate-commitments.pdf>

⁷ FDA Foods and Veterinary Medicine Program Strategic Plan 2012-2016. April 2012. Available at:
<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AboutFDA/CentersOffices/OfficeofFoods/UCM273732.pdf>