



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF

HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH

Commissioner

Gotham Center
42-09 28th Street, 8th Floor
Queens, NY 11101-4132

+ 1 347 396 4100 tel

October 8, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
United States Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:

On behalf of the thirty-one undersigned health authorities and organizations, I am writing to urge the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to develop and implement strategies to reduce sodium in foods sold in the United States.

High sodium intake is associated with elevated blood pressure, which is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Americans consume an average of 3,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day, well in excess of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans' recommendation of 2,300 mg per day. Most Americans would benefit from lowering their sodium intake, but it is difficult for individuals to do because nearly 80% of sodium consumed comes from packaged and restaurant food. The food industry is able to add any amount of sodium to foods because the FDA considers salt to be generally recognized as safe (GRAS).

It has been four years since the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended that the FDA limit sodium in foods by modifying the GRAS status of salt and that a coordinated voluntary effort be implemented as an interim measure. We applaud the FDA for requesting public comments in 2011 on strategies to lower sodium intake. The FDA has acknowledged its intention "to consider options to identify and implement sodium reduction targets" in its 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, but has not yet taken any action.

We urge the FDA to set gradual sodium reduction targets for packaged and restaurant foods this year. By taking meaningful steps to encourage companies to reduce sodium density in the food supply, the FDA can help lower population sodium intake. The amount of sodium in similar products varies widely, demonstrating that making and selling lower-sodium food is possible.

Additionally, almost 30 companies committed to the National Salt Reduction Initiative's voluntary sodium reduction targets, indicating that sodium reduction is a priority for many food manufacturers, restaurant chains, and supermarkets. Thousands more companies make and sell foods that contribute to dietary sodium intake. Federal action is needed to level the playing field for companies already successfully selling products with less sodium.

The scientific literature overwhelmingly indicates the adverse health risks of high sodium intake, and the health and financial benefits of reducing population sodium intake are clear. The most effective way to reduce sodium intake is through a systematic reduction of sodium in the food supply, which requires changes from the food industry and strong guidance and support from the federal government. We value the FDA's commitment to ensuring that our food system is conducive to promoting America's public health, and hope that sodium reduction will be made a priority.

Sincerely,

Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Signatories

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Heart Association
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutritionists
Baltimore City Health Department
California Department of Public Health
Cambridge Public Health Department
Chicago Department of Public Health
Consumers Union
Cook County Department of Public Health
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Health Power for Minorities (Health Power)
Kaiser Permanente
Maricopa County Department of Public Health
Massachusetts 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

NYC Health Department
Northwest Kidney Centers
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
Oregon Health Authority
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law
Society for the Analysis of African-American Public Health Issues
Southern Nevada Health District
Texas Medical Association
Washington State Department of Health

Cc:

Margaret A. Hamburg, Commissioner, United States Food and Drug Administration
Thomas Frieden, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

MTB/el