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SUPPORT FOR HEALTH CANADA'S TRANS FAT TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 16, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse Health Canada's Trans Fat Task Force recommendations:
 - a) "Foods purchased by retailers or food service establishments from a manufacturer for direct sale to consumers be regulated on a finished product or output basis and foods prepared on site by retailers or food service establishments be regulated on an ingredient or input basis.
 - b) For all vegetable oils and soft, spreadable (tub-type) margarines sold to consumers or for use as an ingredient in the preparation of foods on site by retailers or food service establishments, the total trans fat content be limited by regulation to 2% of total fat content.
 - c) For all other foods purchased by a retail or food service establishment for sale to consumers or for use as an ingredient in the preparation of foods on site, the total trans fat content be limited by regulation to 5% of total fat content. This limit does not apply to food products for which the fat originates exclusively from ruminant meat or dairy products.
 - d) Regulations be finalized by June 2008.
 - e) A basic phase-in period be set at one year from the date of entry into force of the final regulations.
 - f) Extended phase-in periods be specified for certain applications (e.g. baking) and for small and medium-sized firms, recognizing that in most cases the transition could be made within two years of the date of entry into force of the final regulations.
 - g) The Government of Canada and all concerned food industry associations urge companies affected to use the most healthful oils for their food applications."
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Federal Minister of Health, the Provincial Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Provincial Minister of Health

Promotion, the Ontario Public Health Association, and the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is:

- To provide information on the detrimental health effects of trans fats.
- To highlight initiatives that have been implemented to address this issue.
- To endorse Health Canada's Trans Fat Task force recommendations.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 What Are Trans Fats

Industrially produced trans fats are created by the partial hydrogenation of unsaturated, liquid fats. The resultant fats are semi-solid, making them ideal for spreads. They are also more stable, meaning they do not spoil as readily, and are much cheaper than natural fats. Partially hydrogenated fats are also ideal for use when flaky, crispy and more tender characteristics are desired in the food product.

Significant sources of trans fat in our food supply include:

- shortening
- stick margarines
- commercially-manufactured donuts, cakes, and cookies
- crackers
- microwave popcorn
- French fries
- soup mixes
- hot chocolate mixes
- breaded and fried foods
- coffee whiteners

3.2 Effect of Trans Fats on Health

High intakes of trans fat increase LDL (bad) cholesterol and decrease the HDL (good) cholesterol. This raises an individual's risk of heart disease. A systematic review of studies of trans fats published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2006 found that a 2% increase in energy intake from trans fatty acids was associated with a 23% increase in the incidence of coronary heart disease.

In their 2002 report, the Institute of Medicine stated that there is no safe level for trans fat and recommended that intake be as low as possible. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Heart Association recommend that less than 1% of total calories come from trans fat, which is equivalent to about 2 grams per day.

Canadian intake of trans fat is one of the highest in the world. Research from Health Canada finds that the average Canadian intake of trans fat is 8.4 grams per day, which is about 10% of daily calories. Even more alarming is that young men aged 18 to 34 are estimated to eat 39 grams of trans fat per day.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Recommendations of Trans Fat Task Force

Health Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada formed a Trans Fat Task Force in 2005, following federal legislation to develop recommendations to eliminate or reduce processed trans fat in Canadian foods. In June 2006, the Task Force published their recommendations, which called for a regulatory approach to control industrially produced trans fat in the Canadian food supply. It is estimated that, if implemented, these recommendations would reduce Canadians' trans fat intake by almost 70%. This would enable Canadians to consume less than 1% of daily calories from trans fat – which is in line with current recommendations.

In its final report, *TRANSforming the Food Supply*, the Task Force recommended that:

- “Foods purchased by retailers or food service establishments from a manufacturer for direct sale to consumers be regulated on a finished product or output basis and foods prepared on site by retailers or food service establishments be regulated on an ingredient or input basis.
- For all vegetable oils and soft, spreadable (tub-type) margarines sold to consumers or for use as an ingredient in the preparation of foods on site by retailers or food service establishments, the total trans fat content be limited by regulation to 2% of total fat content.
- For all other foods purchased by a retail or food service establishment for sale to consumers or for use as an ingredient in the preparation of foods on site, the total trans fat content be limited by regulation to 5% of total fat content. This limit does not apply to food products for which the fat originates exclusively from ruminant meat or dairy products.
- Regulations be finalized by June 2008.
- A basic phase-in period be set at one year from the date of entry into force of the final regulations.
- Extended phase-in periods be specified for certain applications (e.g. baking) and for small and medium-sized firms, recognizing that in most cases the transition could be made within two years of the date of entry into force of the final regulations.

- The Government of Canada and all concerned food industry associations urge companies affected to use the most healthful oils for their food applications.”

The Task Force’s recommendations were presented to the Federal Health Minister in June of 2006. A response to the report has not yet occurred.

4.1.1 Support for Task Force Recommendations

The Ontario Public Health Association and the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health have both urged the federal government to implement the Trans Fat Task Force recommendations. They both recommend a shorter implementation period than outlined in the Task Force’s report.

Boards of health from the Regional Municipality of Niagara and the City of Toronto have also advocated for the implementation of Task Force recommendations.

4.2 York Region Health Services Programming That Addresses Trans Fat

The health effects of trans fat are addressed by public health nutrition staff in many program areas. For example:

- The Healthy Measures E-bulletin is a biweekly e-bulletin that is sent free-of-charge to over 875 subscribers who work or live in York Region. The messages provide information on healthy living and nutrition. The message about reducing trans fat from the diet is echoed in many of the nutrition e-bulletin messages and is reinforced in the links to further resources.
- Healthy Measures...in the Workplace is a four-part workshop series for employees of workplaces across York Region that educates and facilitates skill building around nutrition and healthy eating. Throughout all four workshops, references are made to dietary fats, including trans fats. In the food-labelling workshop, employees are taught to identify trans fats.
- Through the *Eat Smart!* Program, restaurants and cafeterias can apply to receive an award each year based on food safety and nutrition criteria. For workplace and school cafeterias, the nutrition criteria include a standard about the use of healthy fats in the preparation of sandwiches and other menu items. This program addresses the broader “nutrition environment” in workplace and school cafeterias and tries to make it easier for patrons to make healthier food choices, which includes the avoidance of trans fats.
- The Nutrition Matters Fact Sheets are a series of fact sheets developed by Nutrition Services on a variety of topics. Several of these fact sheets speak of trans fats and how to avoid them. In particular, one fact sheet on dietary fats goes into more detail about all the different types of fats including trans fat.

4.3 Other Initiatives to Reduce Trans Fats

Nationally and internationally, various levels of government have proposed or implemented programs to reduce trans fat in the food supply.

4.3.1 The United States

Public awareness of the negative effects of trans fats greatly increased in 2003, when an attorney from Tiburon, California, sued Kraft Foods and McDonalds's Corporation over the use of trans fat. As a result, Kraft eliminated trans fat from Oreo cookies and reduced or eliminated it in about 650 other products.

Subsequently, a campaign against trans fat in Tiburon led to the voluntary elimination of trans fat in the city's 18 restaurants. In 2004, Tiburon became the first American city to be trans fat-free. Since then, other towns and cities in the United States have moved to reduce and eliminate trans fat from their food supply. For example:

- In December 2006, New York City's board of health passed a motion to ban artificial trans fat in restaurants. Restaurants have until July 2007 to discontinue using frying oils that contain trans fat and will have to eliminate the trans fat from all of their food by July 2008.
- In January 2007, Los-Angeles city and county officials came to an agreement with restaurants to voluntarily phase out trans fats within 18 months. Incentives and education will be used for enforcement instead of penalties.
- In February 2007, Philadelphia passed a law prohibiting the city's eating establishments from frying foods in trans fats or serving trans-fat-based spreads as of September 2007. A ban on trans fats in other types of food prepared in Philadelphia restaurants will take effect in September 2008.

4.3.2 Canada

In January 2007, Calgary Health Region announced that it was considering the elimination of trans fats from food premises in Calgary. The city is in the process of consulting the public, industry representatives, and various levels of government about the proposed ban.

In March 2007, the City of Toronto's Board of Health requested that all city Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Divisions operating food premises voluntarily reduce the amount of artificially-produced trans fat in foods served and sold in city-operated facilities.

4.3.3 Denmark

In March 2003, Danish Veterinary and Food Administration introduced a limit on trans fat content of fats and oils sold, as such or when used in foods, of not more than 2% of fatty acids.

4.3.4 Australia

The Australian government has established a National Collaboration on Trans Fats that will propose initiatives aimed at reducing the amount of trans fatty acids in food sold in Australia. The government is considering compulsory labelling on food products to show exactly how much trans fat is present and, in an effort to significantly reduce trans fats by the end of 2007, is urging the food industry to find alternatives to trans fatty acids.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no budgetary implications associated with this report.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There are no local municipal implications for this report.

7. CONCLUSION

Consumption of trans fats is associated with an increased risk of heart disease. The federal government has commissioned recommendations from the Trans Fat Task Force on eliminating trans fat from the Canadian food supply. To date, however, there has been no response to these recommendations.

York Region's support of the Trans Fat Task Force's recommendations, along with support from several other health units in Ontario, may provide the needed endorsement to further the legislation so that it can be enacted into law.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Acting Medical Officer of Health and Director of Public Health Programs, in the Public Health Branch of the Health Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.