



Papa John's removed monosodium glutamate from its ranch dressing last year and pulled trans fats from its garlic sauce. Photo: Bloomberg

## Government to finalize regulation to limit trans fats during covid-19 pandemic

3 min read . Updated: 20 Aug 2020, 07:11 PM IST

[Neetu Chandra Sharma](#)

Over 55,000 persons in India have succumbed to the covid-19 of which majority suffered from one or the other comorbid conditions such as heart ailments, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, kidney diseases etc

The centre will soon finalize a proposed regulation to limit Trans Fatty Acids (TFAs) or trans fats in food products as their higher consumption may put people at fatal risk of covid-19.

Over 55000 persons in India have succumbed to the covid-19 of which majority suffered from one or the other comorbid conditions such as heart ailments, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, kidney diseases etc. "Higher content of Trans fats in food is a potential cause of heart ailments and stroke. Comorbid medical conditions such as of heart are a major risk factor for covid-19. Majority of Patients who have died due to covid-19 in India had comorbid conditions. We have decided to expedite a proposed trans-fat limiting regulation as this is need of the hour during the pandemic," said Arun Singhal chief executive officer at Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) told Mint on Thursday.

India's apex food regulator proposed a draft regulation in September 2019 to limit trans fats in food products not more than 2% through an amendment in the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.

"Since businesses of majority of hotels, restaurants, even normal eateries have suffered due to covid-19 pandemic, there may be little attention to labelling of trans fats. Earlier the food manufacturers took a voluntary pledge w.e.f. 1 January 2022 to limit trans fats. But we are now planning to make it mandatory as soon as possible," said Singhal.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), industrially-produced TFAs are contained in hardened vegetable fats, such as margarine and ghee, and are often present in snack food, baked foods, and fried foods. Manufacturers often use them as they have a longer shelf life than other fats.

Currently, India accounts for the largest number of deaths caused due to TFA in the world per year; between 60,000 – 75,000 are estimated to die because of these fats. At present, Indian regulation limits the amount of TFA in food to 5%, more than double the recommended amount of 2%.

In 2018, India made a public commitment to remove TFA from its food systems by 2022. However, while the country has created a draft regulation in 2019, no concrete legislative action has been taken on this front.

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) also officially recognized TFA as a threat to food security. It not only recognized TFA as a low-hanging fruit whose elimination can result in exponential benefits to the population, but also created a framework for their elimination – REPLACE (Review, Promote, Legislate, Access, Create, Enforce). The aim of the organization is to eliminate TFA from the global food system by 2023.

Various countries have started making legislation to slowly phase out TFA. Denmark, one of the early movers in this regard, created legislation limiting the amount of TFA in foods as early as 2004. Other countries such as Chile introduced a mandatory national Front-of-Package nutrient warning label policy in 2016 to build consumer awareness around TFA.

“Mandatory trans-fat limits or bans on partially hydrogenated oils are currently in effect for 2.4 billion people in 28 countries. Yet more than 5 billion people including people in India are still being exposed to industrially produced trans-fat in their food supply. As we struggle to cope with the ongoing health crisis, this is an opportunity for governments and regulators to make the food we eat safer and more nutritious,” Vandana Shah, Regional Director, South Asia Programs at Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI) said.