

PREVENTING HEART DISEASE AND STROKE THROUGH SALT REDUCTION

Front-of-package warning labels

The World Health Organization recommends front-of-pack labels to promote healthy diets and reduce diseases such as heart attacks and strokes.¹ Simple, prominent warning labels on the front of packages encourage companies to produce and consumers to choose healthier food. The labels indicate which products are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat; they help consumers make healthier choices.²⁻⁷ Healthier choices result in lower blood pressure and reduced risk of heart attack, stroke, and other health problems.

Chile's pioneering strategy



Chile has been a pioneer. Since 2016, it has required companies to prominently display black octagonal warning labels on packaged foods that exceed sugar, salt, saturated fat or calorie limits. Companies cannot sell products with warning labels to or in schools or market them to children. This policy resulted in a 14% reduction in sodium in products purchased by consumers.⁷

Comprehensive policies in addition to mandatory front-of-pack warning labels

Warning labels are most effective in reducing sodium intake when part of a comprehensive program that includes:

- Bans on marketing, promotion, and sponsorship of unhealthy foods
- Bans on sale of unhealthy foods in schools and other public places
- Taxation of products that carry a warning label
- Mandatory sodium limits for commonly consumed, high sodium products

Reasons to require front-of-pack warning labels

Front-of-pack warning labels help consumers purchase healthier products. Consumers need an easy way to make healthier choices from the wide array of food available. Front-of-pack warning labels are immediately visible, easily understandable, and discourage consumers from unhealthy choices. These labels lead to large reductions in the sodium, sugar and calorie content of consumer purchases.^{4,8}

Requiring front-of-package labels encourages companies to reformulate products, as manufacturers avoid having unhealthy products called out by the prominent label. After the first phase of Chile's labeling and advertising law, the percentage of products high in sodium decreased from 74% to 27%.⁹

Front-of-pack warning labels reduce health inequalities. Groups spanning education and socioeconomic levels and those with poor health conditions understand and prefer warnings labels to other labeling schemes.^{6, 10, 11} Front-of-pack labels do not increase prices of food.¹²

Policy momentum continues to grow

Since Chile's law went into effect, nine other countries have adopted warning labels. Countries are now passing even more effective warning label policies by closing loopholes.¹³ Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia, Argentina and Venezuela adopted a similar model to Chile's mandatory warning label policy.¹⁴ Israel, Canada and Brazil also adopted mandatory warning label policies.¹⁵

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