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Nutrition menu labeling and artificial trans fat

Update • December 2007

This is a monthly update provided by Public Health - Seattle & King County about the implementation of new trans fat and menu labeling regulations. For more information, go online: www.metrokc.gov/health/healthyeating

Key dates

- **May 1, 2008:** The first phase to eliminate artificial trans fat in King County goes into effect, and it applies to fry oils and shortenings used for deep frying or in spreads.
- **August 1, 2008:** Food establishments will have conducted the nutritional analysis and put the information on menus and menu boards.
- **February 1, 2009:** Food establishments must eliminate artificial trans fat from other products served except if served in the original package, such as potato chips.

Policy update

In July 2007, the King County Board of Health passed the artificial trans fat and nutrition menu labeling legislation. In recent months, Public Health along with stakeholders have been working on the development of these policies. The draft nutrition menu labeling and artificial trans fat policies will be presented for final review to the King County Board of Health at its January 17, 2008 meeting.

Food establishments, food industry and stakeholders

Stakeholder Groups: The two stakeholder groups – one for artificial trans fat and another for nutrition menu labeling – have been meeting regularly. Each group has representation from food industry and restaurant establishments. The artificial trans fat group has met twice and the nutrition menu labeling group has met three times.

The groups have:

- provided comments on the draft policy and procedures for trans fat and menu labeling
- reviewed and made suggestions regarding Guidance for Nutritional Analysis of Standard Menu Items
- shared information about trans fat free products available for fry oils, shortenings and spreads (phase one starting May 1)
- provided input into developing the guidance for alcoholic beverage nutrition menu labeling of wine, beer and distilled spirits

For a summary of the meetings, visit: www.metrokc.gov/health/healthyeating.

Ethnic restaurants: To receive input beyond the stakeholder groups and from smaller establishments about the trans fat regulation, Public Health identified 12 small ethnic restaurants throughout the county to conduct key informant interviews. In these interviews carried out in November, Public Health found:

- Most of the owners and managers want the restaurant suppliers to have accurate information about the products they buy and to make it easy to choose oils that satisfy the new requirement
- Most are not currently using oils with trans fat
- They want to get information and assistance from the Public Health website and from their inspectors
- They did not have a good understanding of what trans fat is or why it's bad for health, but they had all heard about the ban in the news. One owner thought that she would also be required to implement menu labeling in her restaurant.
- No one thought changing to trans fat free oils would be a difficult transition

Public Health is using this information to guide its on-going education work.

Education and communication

New Prevention Block Grant: Public Health was awarded a new Prevention Block Grant from the State Department of Health for nutrition menu labeling education. This was a competitive grant process, and Public Health was awarded \$150,000 over three years beginning in 2008. This grant will support education activities by Public Health and its partners to promote healthy nutrition choices.

Restaurant and industry education: Public Health sent an educational mailing to approximately 10,500 food establishments permitted by Public Health (see accompanying document). The mailing includes a fact sheet on the regulations and information on how to contact Public Health with questions and comments. In addition, all inspectors will be covering the new rules during 2008 educational visits, and will bring additional information sheets with them.