

Opening remarks: Webinar Salt Smart Americas

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Dear colleagues in the room and those who are virtually connected, welcome to the Webinar organized by AHA and PAHO to celebrate 2015 salt awareness week. Since 2011, PAHO and countries in the Americas has been joining World Action on Salt and Health in celebrating the Week, with the aim to bring attention to the high consumption of sodium./salt at population level in the Americas as significant cause of preventable heart diseases, stroke, some cancers and kidney disease.

We have participants connected from Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guatemala, and Antigua.

Every year we have intensive communication campaign, using classical and social media and the Webinar that showcases the advances between last year and this year salt Awareness week. Many countries in the Americas join the celebration at national level.

13 countries in the Americas have undertaken national initiatives ranging from mass media and educational campaigns to collaboration with food industry to improve nutrition labels and reformulate their products to contain less salt. Expanding these efforts to other countries could save tens of thousands of lives over the next decade.

Researchers in Canada have estimated that reducing sodium intake by 10 percent each year in 18 Latin American countries could prevent 593,000 cardiovascular events and save some 54,000 lives. Cost-effectiveness studies have shown that reducing salt consumption at the population level can cut the prevalence of related chronic diseases at a cost of between 4 and 32 US cents per person per year.

Although salt is essential to the human body, In most countries of the Americas, average salt consumption is significantly higher than the internationally recommended limit of less than 5 grams of salt per day. Brazilians consume close to 11 grams a day on average, while Argentines consume 12 grams, Canadians consume 7.7 grams, and people in the United States consume 8.7 grams per person per day.

The problem is not just salt added to food during cooking or at the table. As nutrition transition advances more and more sodium/salt comes from ready-made meals and prepared foods including bread, processed meats, breakfast cereals, and snack foods.

We already have success stories in our region regarding lowering salt in food: In Argentina, and Chile the sodium content in most popular breads is reduced thanks to agreements with bakers.

Targets for several food groups are closely being monitored in US and they show decrease in salt content in multiple food products and restaurant chains.

Brazil has fulfilled their first goals in reduction of salt content set for 2014, focusing on main food groups with high consumption and high salt content (instant pasta, sliced bread and buns)

Just to remind you that the Americas initiative has adopted the internationally recommended target of less than 2000 mg sodium or 5 g salt from all sources per person per day by 2020.

This initiative has engaged multiple experts from North and South, has mobilized governments, civil society and food industry and focusing on

- Changing a social norm around salt consumption “less is more”
- Engaging multinational food industry to adopt voluntary targets for reducing salt in food products bread, soups, processed meats, pasta, biscuits and cookies, breakfast cereals, and condiments. .
- Inclusion of salt sessions in public health meetings and conferences.
- Monitoring of sodium content in foods and levels of consumption in the population.

This year the Week is bringing our attention to the consumption of salt/sodium among children. Like adults they consume more than needed, and they have little involvement in what they eat, so this is a call to the conscience for society and all key players to secure the health of future generations.