



News Release

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New report shows mixed progress by food industry to reduce salt

Public Health England (PHE) has published the first assessment of the food industry's progress towards meeting the government's latest salt reduction targets, showing an overall mixed picture.

Set by the government in 2014, the most recent targets cover 28 food categories for the food industry – retailers, manufacturers and out of home sector, including restaurants, cafés and pub chains – to achieve by 2017. These categories include bread, crisps and ready meals.

Companies were asked to meet average and maximum targets for salt content per 100g, with the maximum targets ranging from 0.13g in canned vegetables to 3.75g in curry pastes. The foods covered by the programme provide more than half the salt in the nation's diet¹.

While salt reduction has been ongoing since 2006², progress towards meeting food targets was previously self-reported by the food industry. This is the first in-depth assessment using commercial data.

For retailers and manufacturers (the in-home sector), the analysis shows:

- Just over half of all average salt reduction targets were met, with retailers making more progress than manufacturers;
- All average salt targets were met in 9 food categories, including breakfast cereals and baked beans, however meat products met none; and
- Four in five foods had salt levels at or below the maximum targets set.

In addition to the targets set for all industry sectors across the 28 categories, the out of home sector was also set maximum per-serving targets in 11 food categories, including sandwiches, pasta dishes, and children's meals. The report shows:

- Seven in 10 foods did not exceed maximum targets; and
- Salt levels are generally higher in out of home products, compared to in-home.

Excess salt intake can cause high blood pressure, which can lead to cardiovascular disease (CVD), one of the main causes of premature death for adults in the UK.

Since it was established, the salt reduction programme has helped to reduce the nation's salt intake by 11%, to 8 grams per day³. If this was brought closer to the recommended 6 grams a day, it could help to prevent thousands of avoidable deaths.

¹ Based on data from the [National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#).

² The first salt reduction targets were set in 2006, with subsequent targets set in 2009, 2011 and then in 2014, which is the first time specific targets were set for the out-of-home sector.

³ [National Diet and Nutrition Survey \(assessment of dietary sodium\), 2014](#).

Public Health Minister Steve Brine said:

“While it is encouraging to see the food industry is making progress towards the salt reduction targets we set in 2014, we know there is more to do.

“That’s why we committed to further reducing salt intake in our prevention vision. Next year we will put forward realistic but ambitious goals and set out details of how we will meet them.”

Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at PHE, said:

“Too much salt can lead to increased blood pressure which can cause heart disease and stroke – two of the biggest killers of adults in the UK – which is why government has set such stretching targets.

“While we have seen some progress, those that have taken little or no action cannot be excused for their inactivity. It is clear that, with the right leadership from industry, further salt reduction in foods continues to be possible.”

In its prevention vision, the government has committed to setting out the next steps for salt reduction by Easter 2019.

Salt reduction forms part of PHE’s wider reduction programme that also includes work to reduce sugar and calories in everyday foods.

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Notes to editors

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1. Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Website: www.gov.uk/phe. Twitter: [@PHE_uk](https://twitter.com/PHE_uk), Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland
2. The salt reduction programme was established by government in 2006 as a mechanism to help drive down population salt intake and reduce the risk of high blood pressure and the alarming rates of heart disease. Since it was established, four sets of industry targets have been published.
3. Report will be published on gov.uk at 9.30am on 19/12/18:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/latest?organisations%5B%5D=public-health-england>