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World Action on Salt and Health (WASH)

Media Release

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New research reveals huge differences in salt contents in global brands

23 July 2009. New research shows that people in some countries are being fed over twice as much salt in popular global brands as their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) has surveyed over 260 food products available around the world from food manufacturers such as KFC, McDonalds, Kellogg's, Nestle, Burger King and Subway. Not one product surveyed had the same salt content around the world and some displayed huge differences in salt content from one country to another.

Kellogg's All Bran, for instance, contains 2.15g of salt per 100g in Canada, but only 0.65g of salt per 100g just over the border in the United States, less than a third of the Canadian level. Looking at the salt content for Kellogg's Cornflakes, the survey found that the Middle East is served the highest salt product at 2.8g of salt per 100g. The lowest salt Kellogg's Cornflakes surveyed were in Spain, with 1.8g salt per 100g, a gram less than the Middle East's level of 2.8g salt per 100g.

A Burger King Bacon Double Cheeseburger bought in Brazil contains 3.2g of salt, while one bought in the UK contains much less at 2.1g of salt per burger.

There is even variation in the McDonald's iconic Big Mac: In Cyprus it contains 2.0g of salt while in Guatemala it contains around a third more salt at 2.7g.

A KFC Original Fillet Burger in New Zealand contains 3.7g of salt per while the same product in neighbouring Australia has 2.4g of salt. And Nestlé's Fitness cereal has 2.1g of salt per 100g in Colombia, while across Europe consumers can eat the same product with only 1.3g of salt per 100g.

The UK generally has salt levels in the bottom half of the table for most products, reflecting the fact that salt has been a focus for public health in this country for several years. But despite this, the UK does not have the lowest salt products across the board: the US has Kellogg's All Bran at half the salt level of that available in the UK, and the UK Subway Club 6 inch sandwich contains 3.7g of salt, compared with just 2.0g of salt in the same product in Finland. }

"Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide," [Ref. 1] says Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of WASH and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine. [Ref. 2] "Eating too much salt puts up our blood pressure, the major risk factor of CVD. This leads to millions needlessly suffering and dying from heart attacks, heart failure and strokes each year. If we reduce our salt intake by just a few grammes a day, we can all reduce our risk of heart disease and stroke.[Ref. 3]

"The fact that companies distribute products with so much less salt in some countries raises serious ethical concerns. It is very hypocritical for manufacturers to make healthy claims about their products whilst unnecessarily adding to worldwide health inequalities. A gradual reduction in salt can easily be done across all products in all countries. We urge all manufacturers to make these reductions not just in a few fortunate countries, but across the world."

"We really need food manufacturers to reduce the amount of salt they add to our food across the globe," says WASH Co-ordinator and Nutritionist Katharine Jenner. "If Kellogg's can provide Spain with lower salt Cornflakes, why can't the rest of the

world's consumers have them too? Reducing the world's salt intake would save literally millions of lives, but the global food brands still seem reluctant to provide their healthiest products to everybody in the world.”

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Notes to Editors

- All data is sourced from manufacturers' corporate websites.
- We have only included the products and equivalent products within countries for which we could locate information. We have compared salt per 100g for cereals, where portion sizes vary between countries (Kellogg's).
- Products are those stated or their equivalents, as stated in the 'notes' section. Products translated from native language to English.

References

- 1 – Karppanen H, Mervaala E. Sodium intake and mortality. *Lancet*. 1998;**351**:1509.
- 2 – World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) was established in 2005 and is a global group with the mission to improve the health of populations throughout the world by achieving a gradual reduction in salt intake. WASH has 360 members from 80 countries <http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/>
- 3 – Cook NR, Cutler JA, Obarzanek E, Buring JE, Rexrode KM, Kumanyika SK, et al. Long term effects of dietary sodium reduction on cardiovascular disease outcomes: observational follow-up of the trials of hypertension prevention (TOHP). *BMJ*. 2007;**334**:885.