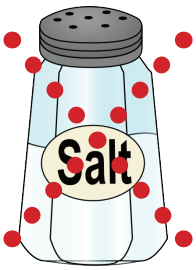
World Health Organization
Myanmar

WHO Myanmar newsletter
September - December 2020

Why is high *salt intake* bad for your health?



Consumption of salt more than 5 grams per day increases blood pressure and puts people at greater risk of heart disease and stroke. It is ranked as a leading risk factor for high blood pressure, globally. Over 4.1 million annual deaths globally are linked to excess intake of salt.

Beware of sodium in your food

Consuming excess amount of salt can raise blood pressure at any age. Sodium is the chemical element found in salt that is responsible for the elevation of blood pressure. Recommended daily limits -- **less than 5 grams of salt** intake or less than 2 grams (2,000 mg) of sodium intake.

High blood pressure – a silent killer

High blood pressure is a long-term medical condition in which the blood pressure is persistently elevated. **High blood pressure** is a major risk factor leading to deaths due to heart disease and stroke.

Heart disease and stroke claim lives at a younger age

Heart disease and stroke are among leading causes of death in the South-East Asia Region. In Myanmar, **one in every four** deaths is estimated to be due to heart disease and stroke, often not yet 70 years.

Costs of treating heart disease & stroke are high

Treatment cost of heart disease and stroke are commonly very high. They usually need **long-term treatment** and result in high out-of-pocket expenditure to families, which can push many households into **catastrophic health expenditure** and impoverishment.

HEARTS

Reducing salt intake is one of the most cost-effective measures to improve population health outcomes.

Love your heart – reduce salt & sodium intake

WHO recommends to reduce salt intake to less than 5 grams per day.

Coronavirus disease (Covid19) update

- As at 17 August 2020, 216 countries or territories reported **21,516,760** *cases* and **766,663** *deaths* from Covid19. There are currently *several* epicentres in the world, notably in the Americas and in South Asia.
- In Myanmar, **376** *confirmed* cases have been detected as at 17 August 2020, and **6** *deaths*.
- Common symptoms of Covid19 are fever, tiredness, dry cough, loss of taste, loss of smell, difficulty breathing.
- Simple preventive measures have proven very effective.

do the '3ws'	avoid '3cs'
wash your hands	crowded places
watch your distance	close contact settings
wear your mask	confined poorly ventilated areas

- Our newsletter *special* of 4 April 2020 has further details https://bit.ly/2zRDMfm
- How to wear your **fabric mask safely** is available in Myanmar language at https://bit.ly/3gvKesw

High blood pressure, salt intake & Covid19

Patients with raised blood pressure have a two-fold increased risk of dying from the Covid19 compared to patients without high blood pressure. People with uncontrolled high blood pressure were at even greater risk of developing complications of Covid19. Reduce use of salt and food high in sodium helps to control blood pressure.

Food preparation & consumption while you stay at home

When preparing to stay at home, make sure to have vegetables, fruits, pulses, rice that can be stored. For example, pumpkin, beans, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, chayote, roots, guava, banana. Vegetables and fruits are rich in potassium and they help the body balance sodium.

During an outbreak, availability of fresh foods may be less. Hence it could become necessary to rely on packed, processed foods. Many of such foods contain high levels of salt and sodium.

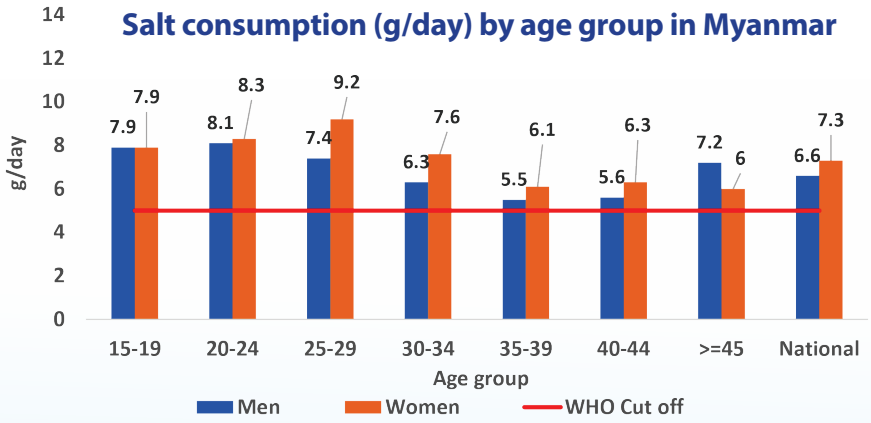
Therefore, to balance your salt intake, *prioritize food with reduced or no added salt* - and eat food rich in potassium.

Salt consumption in Myanmar

Most people consume **too much salt**—on average 9–12 grams per day, or around **twice** the recommended maximum intake. Recent surveys (MMFCS 2018)* show high consumption of salt in Myanmar, **young adults** consume nearly double the recommended level of salt. Further, **women consume more** salt than men.

About **46%** of the students aged 13–17 years tend to eat junk food high in salt on 2 or more days a week.

Only **18.2%** of students appear to eat fruits and vegetables two or more times per day.



* *source: Myanmar micronutrient & food consumption survey (MMFCS) 2020 (accessment period 2017-2018)*

Why reducing salt intake helps us stay healthy

Robust scientific evidence shows that reducing **salt** and **sodium** intake reduces blood pressure and could prevent many early deaths from heart disease and stroke. A global population study** provided further evidence: a reduction in blood pressure by 20mmHg at community level can reduces deaths due to heart disease & stroke by **50%** among economically active adults.

Salt reduction prevents heart disease and stroke.

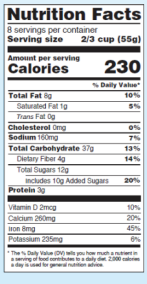
"One teaspoon of salt for a day"

** *source: Mean Systolic Blood Pressure: situation & trends (WHO)* https://bit.ly/3alQoJV

how to reduce consumption of salt and prevent ill health

what *you* can do

- **identify** & **reduce** consumption of food high in salt and sodium
- **avoid** snacks high in salt and sodium, e.g. chips,
- **reduce** quantity of salt *added* during cooking
- **remove** table salt from dining table
- **reduce** intake of highly processed foods: they are *high* in salt and sodim.
- **increase** consumption of fruits and vegetables that are high in potassium
- **replace** salt with **natural herbs** and spices during cooking
- **compare** labels when buying food, **choose** products with less salt and less sodium



Please note - some foods that are high in salt don't taste very salty e.g. sauces. Since they are mixed with other ingredients like sugars that mask the taste. Therefore, it is important the practice of reading food labels to find out sodium levels.

what *communities* can do

- **create** awareness among communities on the risks of **high salt intake** and **high blood pressure**
- **aim** for behaviour change to reduce salt intake, including in cooking and baking
- **impart health literacy** to make healthy choices -- and build skills to interpret food labels
- **improve dietary diversity**, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption

- **provide** a supportive environment for children and young adults to adopt a low sodium diet ***early***
- **work** as a community to achieve changes
- food manufacturers to **reformulate composition** of food products to reduce the salt content
- businesses to **foster responsible marketing** promoting healthy food choices.

Coronavirus Disease (Covid19) updates

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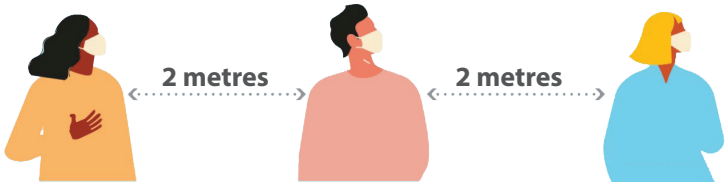
WFP special flight arrives at Yangon with WHO medical supplies for fight against Covid19, at Yangon International Airport, 19 July 2020.

- 30 July 2020 marked six months since WHO declared **Covid19** as a **public health emergency of international concern.**
- WHO Director General convened the 4th meeting of the Emergency Committee associated with the **International Health Regulations** IHR on 31 July 2020.
  - Based on the advice of the IHR emergency committee, WHO Director General declared that the outbreak of Covid19 **continues** to constitute a **public health emergency of international concern**.
  - Further advice included the need for continuing Covid19 response over the long term, indicating the centrality of health in *any* recovery. IHR statement is available in full at https://bit.ly/2PsTYZ5
- WHO published a Covid19 preparedness and response report, highlighting progress made during the period, **1 Feb - 30 June 2020.** https://bit.ly/33weGzf
- Since January 2020, WHO published more than 100 technical documents, guiding the entire spectrum of Covid19 management. All WHO technical documents are at https://bit.ly/3iqysAH

Covid19 & other health issues

- WHO Regional Director for South East Asia convened a virtual meeting of SEAR Ministers of Health **6 Aug 2020,** charting ways to accelerate resumption of essential health services as an integral part of the pandemic response.
- **World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2020**, UNICEF and WHO encourage countries to continue to protect and promote breastfeeding. Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of a baby's life is highly recommended. This also applies to mothers with suspected or confirmed Covid19.



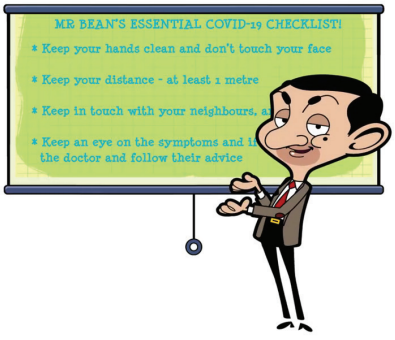
Updates on transmission of Covid19

- Transmission of Covid19 can occur through contact with infected secretions, for example respiratory droplets, saliva, running nose. When an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks or sings, such secretions are expelled.
- Regarding the possibility of *airborne* transmission, Covid19 transmission in *crowded*, *closed*, *poorly ventilated* settings cannot be ruled out. At the same time, more evidence is needed. Further information is available at https://bit.ly/2XwxZEI
- Transmission of Covid19 is ***primarily*** occurring when infected people have symptoms. Transmission can also occur ***just before*** they develop symptoms. More research is needed to ascertain *whether* someone who ***never*** develops symptoms can also pass the virus to others.
- Scientific brief on *transmission* of Covid19 is available at https://bit.ly/3ifD4JK. This brief dicusses current evidence, as at 9 July 2020, and the implications for infection prevention precautions.

7 simple steps to protect yourself and others from Covid19 (Aug 2020) further video link, **in 35 seconds**, at https://bit.ly/2PCV2JE

How to break the chains of transmission further video link, **in 90 seconds**, at https://bit.ly/3irAAbi

WHO Myanmar newsletters *special* related to Covid19 at https://bit.ly/3fQWrbd



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Reopening schools

Reducing the risk of transmission in educational settings is one of the keys to help contain Covid19. Mitigation measures include:

healthy classroom: *wash hands frequently* with soap and water; *increase* desk spacing; *wear a mask* in line with national or local guidance; *practice* respiratory and hand hygiene; *maximize* physical distancing in classrooms & transportation, e.g. school buses; *ventilate* classrooms with fresh air.

healthy building: *hand washing facility* at school entrances; *cleaning* and *disinfecting* frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, desks, toys, supplies, light switches, doorframes, play equipment, teaching aids used by children, and covers of books

healthy policy: *forming a Covid19 preparedness & response team* and plan, implementing a policy of *"staying at home if unwell"* for students, staff and faculty; *establishing* plans for when there is a case; *management* of sick or unwell students, staff or faculty; *monitor* school attendance.

healthy schedules: *manage transition times* between shifts; make lunchtime safe; *advise* against crowding during school pick-up or day care

healthy activities: enable break times for students, staff and faculty; modifying physical education, continuing sports with precautions; *communicating* with parents and students about the phased measures to be taken to re-open schools safely.

monitoring reopening: *monitoring* the effects of policies and measures on educational objectives and learning *outcomes*; effects of policies and measures on health and well-being of children, siblings, staff, parents, other family members; monitor trends in school drop out.

above source: Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, June 2020

Additional information on school reopening:

- **Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of Covid19** https://bit.ly/2PmCn4O
- **Key messages and actions for Covid19 prevention and control in schools** https://bit.ly/2Pn2fO0
- **Risk reduction strategies for reopening schools** https://bit.ly/2Pr9hBy

WHO manifesto for a healthy recovery from Covid19

WHO published a manifesto, containing **six steps** for a **green** recovery from Covid19. It aims to:

1) cherish and protect the source of all human health, the natural world
2) invest in vital, live-saving services, access to water and sanitation, clean energy in healthcare facilities
3) quickly transition to clean, renewable sources of energy
4) switch to healthy and sustainable food systems
5) green all our towns and cities to become healthy
6) shift from an economy driven by profit and pollution to an economy driven by fairness and wellbeing.

We know what we need to do. We have the tools to do it. Let us work together now to create a healthier and greener world.

video source: https://bit.ly/3gpEEbu

Important dates

Regional Director WHO South-East Asia Region & SEAR Health ministers discussed pandemic response & basic health services
6 August 2020

Nutrition Promotion Month
August 2020

73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, Thailand
(virtual session)
9-10 September 2020

World Patient Safety Day
17 September 2020

75th United Nations Day UN75
World Polio Day
24 October 2020

World antibiotic awareness week
18-24 November 2020

World AIDS Day
1 December 2020