

## State targets trans fats

FIRST IN U.S.: GOVERNOR SIGNS CALIFORNIA BAN

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California on Friday became the first state in the country to ban trans fats in restaurants and retail baked goods, a significant step in efforts by health officials to clean up the American diet.

The new law signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger phases out oil, shortening and margarine containing trans fats from restaurant offerings by 2010 and baked goods by 2011. But the legislation will not stop the sale of popular foods like french fries and doughnuts, just change how they are cooked.

"We're not trying to outlaw chocolate here," said Dr. Junaid Khan, an Oakland cardiac and thoracic surgeon and an American Heart Association spokesman, which lobbied heavily for the bill.

Schwarzenegger said he was happy to make California "the first state in the nation to phase out trans fats."

The heart association hailed it as an important step forward in public health that should be adopted by other states.

"California is always ahead of the curve," Khan said.

The California Restaurant Association opposed the bill, maintaining that the federal government should regulate food, but noted that its members are already on their way to ridding their offerings of trans fats.

"While there will be costs involved in terms of finding substitutes, it's far too early to say this will affect prices to customers," spokesman Daniel Conway said.

One local restaurateur said trans fats won't be missed. "Restaurants are better off not using them. It isn't anything that stimulates or intensifies the food anyway," said Michael Miller, owner of Trevese, which serves modern American food in Los Gatos.

"The writing was on the wall," added Jeff Starbuck, owner of four Sonoma Chicken Coop restaurants in San Jose and Campbell. Starbuck said he has begun phasing out the use of trans-fat oils to cook foods such as calamari and breaded chicken sandwiches.

He called the ban "a smart thing to do. It's appealing to a more health-conscious society, and it's what the consumers will be asking for."

Local health inspectors will enforce the law, which carries a penalty ranging from \$25 to \$1,000 per violation. Food sold in packages sealed by manufacturers is exempt.

Trans fats have come under increasing fire as a health hazard in recent years. New York City and Philadelphia are among the cities that have banned them.

The state's move comes as state and local governments are increasingly trying to find ways to combat unhealthy food that causes numerous health problems and soaring medical costs. Santa Clara County recently required chain restaurants in unincorporated areas to list calorie counts on their menus.

Created to be an inexpensive substitute for butter or lard in baking, trans fats have an unfortunate side effect of raising bad cholesterol and lowering good cholesterol.

"It's a double whammy to your heart and arteries," said Jeff Cronin of the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C. Cronin said the center has been lobbying the federal Food and Drug Administration since 2005 to ban trans fats nationwide.

"It has been real useful that cities like New York and now states like California are leap-frogging the federal government and acting on their own to protect their citizens from trans fats," Cronin said.

Since research began on trans fats in the 1990s, scientists have linked trans fats to various diseases, including heart attacks and strokes, breast and prostate cancer, and possibly Type 2 diabetes.

The bill was authored by Assemblyman Tony Mendoza, D-Norwalk. "I hope that others will take note of what we have done here in California and use it as a catalyst," Mendoza said in a statement that called the bill's signing "a call to action."