Trans fat follies in Colorado

By ACSH Staff — February 3, 2012

In a sadly misguided effort, ostensibly intended to curb obesity, Colorado lawmakers are considering a ban on trans-fat in schools. Beyond the regular school meals served in the cafeteria, this ban would extend to vending machines, extra items available at lunch (such as ice cream and pizza), and even after-school bake sales.

Colorado holds the impressive distinction of having the lowest rate of obesity in the country. But while the state’s childhood obesity rate was the country’s third-lowest in 2007, by 2010 it had moved squarely to the middle of the pack, falling to 23rd.

Researchers have attributed this change in childhood obesity statistics to an increase in both sedentary behaviors and childhood poverty. But as ACSH’s Cheryl Martin points out, Although these lawmakers recognize that childhood obesity is rising because of kids being sedentary and because of poverty, instead of targeting these factors, they decide to focus on trans-fat, which has nothing to do with obesity.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross points to this ill-informed proposal as an instance of lawmakers with little or no scientific or medical expertise trying to tackle complex problems with laws that are superficially persuasive but actually baseless. He notes, Studies continue to show that diabetes and obesity are not caused by the consumption of any one specific type of food, not even fat. This includes trans-fat. And he says that, even if trans-fat could be shown to be more harmful to one’s health than regular fat (although an ACSH publication suggests they are not), this still has nothing to do with obesity. Trans-fat does not make people fat; too many calories and not enough physical activity do.

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