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N.Y. votes to ban trans fats in restaurants

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By [Angela Moore](#) & [Russ Britt](#), MarketWatch

Last Update: 5:59 PM ET Dec 5, 2006

NEW YORK (MarketWatch) -- The city of New York voted unanimously Tuesday to drastically reduce the

amount of so-called trans fats in restaurants, in a move that could set trends for other cities.

The New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene confirmed its 11-member board voted to reduce the amount of artery-clogging trans fats found in foods to 0.5 grams. Restaurants will not be allowed to use most frying oils with trans fats by July 1 and will have to eliminate the artificial fats from all their foods by July 2008.

The notice from the city's health board said that about one-third of daily caloric intake for New York City residents comes from foods purchased in restaurants. "Assuring safe and healthy dining options is a public health priority," the notice added.

New York's estimated 24,000 restaurateurs had raised several concerns about the ban on trans fats and whether they would be able to remake their kitchen practices in time to comply with the new order. Late Tuesday, the National Restaurant Association issued a statement against the ruling.

"This is a farm-to-table issue," the association said in a statement. "It takes time to develop, plant, grow, harvest and process new alternative crops and to test new oils. Because of this supply problem, with such a limited timetable, many of the city's restaurateurs will have no choice but to switch to oils high in unhealthy saturated fats, a move opposed by health-advocacy groups."

The association went on to say: "The National Restaurant Association has attempted to work with the New York City Board of Health, but the board seems determined to work against the industry."

'The National Restaurant Association has attempted to work with the New York City Board of Health, but the board seems determined to work against the industry.'

Trans fats can be found in foods fried in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, margarine and vegetable shortening, such as french fries, fried chicken, taco shells, doughnuts, pizza dough, crackers, cookies and pies.

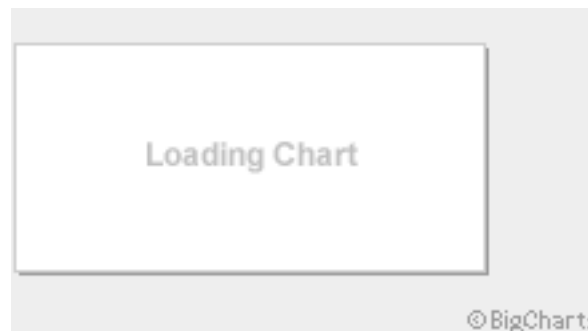
Many restaurant chains, including Wendy's International Inc. , Starbucks Corp. and Yum Brands Inc. have announced plans to eliminate or cut trans fats in their offerings.

McDonald's Corp. ([MCD](#) :

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■ ,) has been working for some time on a healthier cooking oil blend. [See full story.](#)

In 2002, the company said that it would introduce a new oil with sharply lower trans fats , but then shelved the plan because of concerns about altering the taste of its iconic fries.

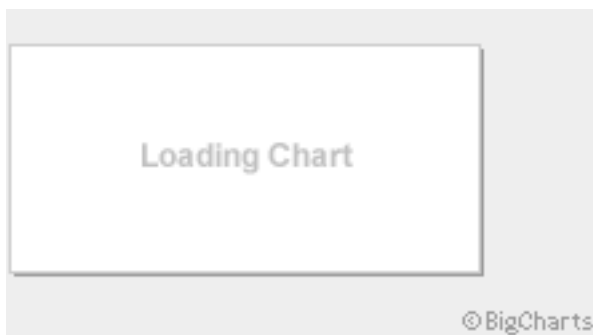
"Wendy's and Yum were out in front on developing new oils, but the company that's going to be the most pressed is McDonald's," said John Owens, an analyst with Morningstar. "What New York has done -- and I would not be surprised if other cities and states followed suit -- will certainly accelerate the timing on this."

The news didn't seem to affect the stock price of major fast-food chains, as McDonald's closed up fractionally. Yum Brands ([YUM](#) :

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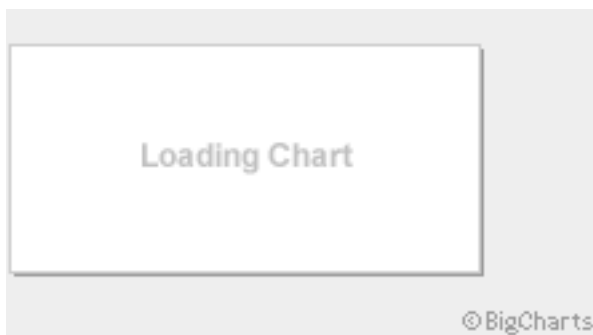
■ ,) , owner of KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, closed up 2.6% as the company said that it expected to meet profit projections and doubled its dividend. [See related story.](#)

But Wendy's ([WEN](#) :

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.,) dropped marginally even though it had prepared for the ban, introducing oils with zero trans fats.

Chicago is also considering a trans-fat restriction, which would apply to large restaurants with more than \$20 million in annual sales.

John Kozup, director of the Center for Marketing and Public Policy Research at Villanova School for Business, said that the ban could be an opportunity for restaurants.

"The companies can come up with products that are construed as healthier and change a premium for them," he suggested. "There are people in New York who are willing to pay more for healthy foods." ■

Angela Moore is a MarketWatch editor based in New York.

Russ Britt is the Los Angeles bureau chief for MarketWatch.

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