



FSSAI proposes draft regulation, categorising menus into green, yellow

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The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has proposed a draft regulation to ensure safe and wholesome food for school children. Titled Food Safety and Standards (Safe and Wholesome Food for School Children) Regulations, 2018, it has categorised menus on the basis of colour coding into green (mostly comprising fresh food), yellow (comprising packaged food) and red [comprising foods high in salt, sugar and fat (HFSS)].

The draft added that the foods and beverages categorised as green or yellow may be included on school menus and reviewed by School Health and Wellness Team on a periodic basis with a focus on continuously improving the safety and nutritious quality of foods served in schools.

According to the draft regulation, a balanced diet for schoolgoers is one that “should provide about 50-60 per cent of the total calories from carbohydrates (preferably from complex carbohydrates), about 10-15 per cent from proteins and 20-30 per cent from both visible and invisible fat. In addition, it should provide such non-nutrients as dietary fibre and antioxidants, which bestow positive health benefits.”

It talked about school meals, which mean all foods sold or supplied on the school campus through canteens, school mess, hostel kitchens, vending machines or any other method, and include all meals served through mid-day meal kitchens and provided to students by the school.

The draft added that the school authority selling or catering school meals must obtain a license or be registered as a food business operator (FBO) from the concerned licensing authority under the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, Rules and Regulations made thereunder.

Shweta Khandelwal, associate professor, Public Health Foundation of India, said, “These regulations are advisory in nature. They focus on knowledge enhancement, repeat exposures, awareness generation and the available mentorship in the area of improved nutritional intake. These guidelines, therefore, help the schools to flexibly choose their modus operandi to reach the desired outcome of improved health and nutrition for children. This idea is great, because it will somehow impact parents or

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caregivers in the long run also. It is a cyclic concept - it will take a cue from schools, impact children and need positive reinforcement from parents. Ultimately, it is the combined duty of all stakeholders to ensure that safe and nutritious food is accessible and available for our children.”

When quizzed whether the draft covered the entire gamut of dos and don'ts for the safety of health of schoolgoers, she said, “No, it is more on the lines of motivating all stakeholders to strive to attain best possible health and nutritional status. The doing part is our responsibility. We can't expect school authorities to do everything. The FSSAI guidelines define the expectations from the school authorities, but without the cooperation of parents and caregivers, it won't translate into a meaningful impact. We must ensure that sensitisation sessions for parents are also conducted once in a while so that they can get a platform to resolve queries or offer suggestions for more realistic discussions.”

Meanwhile, under these regulations, the school authority shall encourage and promote balanced diet as defined by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, in the school canteen, mess or kitchen. The school authority or FBOs selling or catering school meals shall comply with specific labelling requirements for HFSS foods, as prescribed by the food authority from time to time.

It shall try to ensure that FBOs supplying school meals in the school premise identify and select the foods to be served/sold on the basis of the guidelines given under the regulations. It shall ensure that no person offers, or exposes for sale, HFSS foods to school children in school canteens, mess premises or hostel kitchens.

State food authorities shall ensure that no person shall offer, or expose for sale, HFSS foods to school children within 50m of school premises. FBOs manufacturing HFSS food products shall not advertise such foods to children in school premises.

The school authority may create a school health and wellness team, nominating a senior teacher as health and wellness coordinator to coordinate and monitor the availability of safe, healthy and nutritious food. To motivate schools to adopt a comprehensive health-promoting programme, the food authority or the state food authority may adopt a rating system, so as to recognise schools with higher standards and encourage other schools to improve.

The draft spoke about the need for an institutional structure and framework to formulate, coordinate, implement and monitor the policy related to ensuring safe and wholesome food for school children. Suitable committees may be constituted at the national, state and school levels to steer the efforts and to ensure the availability of safe and wholesome food for school children.

The regulation also spoke in detail about the safety, sanitary and hygienic requirements for school meals, food handlers' information, food and raw material storage and transportation information and potable water availability information.

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It also stated, in detail, the general guidelines for the selection of the food colour code availability as follows:

Green

These foods should always be on the menu. At least 80 per cent of the food available should be from this category.

The foods in this category include fresh vegetables and fruits; cooked/prepared meals with cereals; legumes; lean meat, egg or fish; freshly-made soup; cereals, preferably whole grain and/or high in fibre; porridge; low-fat milk, curd and paneer; salad; 100 per cent fruit and vegetable juices; fruit or vegetable juices or other beverages with added water/spices, etc., but with no added sugar, nuts and seeds, and mixes thereof, without added salt or sugar; roasted or stir-fried vegetables; snacks (boiled, baked or steamed) and cereal- or pulses-based savoury products (such as idli, upma, poha, khandvi, dhokla, etc.)

Yellow

These foods must be selected carefully and are to be eaten occasionally, in small portion sizes and with reduced frequencies.

Ice cream; milk-based ices and dairy-based sweetmeats/desserts (not fried); cheeses; canned and preserved vegetables; breads; biscuits; wraps; sandwiches; packaged soups and juices other than those mentioned in the green category; packaged meat or fish products; fruit-, vegetable-, cereal- and pulses-based snacks other than those mentioned in the green category; nuts and seeds, cereal- or malt-based beverages, soya milk, etc.

Red

The availability of these foods should be discouraged in schools. These include HFSS products such as deep-fried foods, including French fries, fried chips, samosa, chole bhature, gulab jamun, etc.; sugar-sweetened carbonated or non-carbonated beverages; ready-to-eat noodles; pizzas; burgers; confectionery items, sugar and sugar-based products, etc.

Ashwin Bhadri, chief executive officer, Equinox Labs, said, "The draft reflects the intricately-analysed key points and loopholes that can act as crucial areas - the entry of contaminants and non-compliances. From clean spatulas, ceilings and kitchen floors to ensuring that no FBO selling HFSS food products is within 50m of the vicinity of a school, the draft has looked into aspects which have remained unventured until now."

"The draft speaks about several points - the presence of a valid license of the FBO associated with the mid-day meal scheme, periodic quality testing, use of food safety display boards, inspections and audits at the site and the legalities, if found non-

compliant. After these basic factors, come the secondary ones - preparation and

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consumption of healthy and hygienic food products, labelling of HFSS food, the minimum sale of such products and the presence of a health and wellness coordinator in the premises. Not to forget, premise safety, personal and personnel hygiene, storage and transportation, potable water availability, etc. The icing on the cake is colour-coded food products for the easy preparation and availability of healthy, hygienic and nutritious food. This entire draft will be highly beneficial for food safety officials, schools and students in ensuring that the future of the country is in safe hands," he added. \