

Final decision on junk food sale, advertisement ban near schools in two months

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The FSSAI has proposed that school authorities will have to adopt a comprehensive programme for promoting safe food and healthy diets among school children. (Representational image)

Food regulator Food and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is likely to finalise within the next two months its **proposed regulations to ban sale as well as advertisements of junk foods in school canteens and within 50 metres of school campuses**, its CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal said on Monday.

The FSSAI had in November issued draft 'Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and healthy diets for School Children) Regulations, 2019'. It had sought comments from stakeholders in 30 days.

"We have received comments from various stakeholders and we are now compiling these suggestions. A technical committee will look into these recommendations," Agarwal said.

He said it would take around 1-2 months to finalise the regulations and then the same would be sent to the health ministry for the final approval.

In its draft regulations, the FSSAI had said that “foods which are referred to as foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) cannot be sold to school children in school canteens or mess premises or hostel kitchens or within 50 metres of the school campus”.

The food business operators (FBOs) manufacturing HFSS food products would be barred from advertising such foods in school premises or within 50 metres of the school campus, it added.

The school authority itself or food business operators (FBOs) contracted by it and FBOs contracted by Department of School Education for operation of the mid-day meal scheme will have to “obtain a registration or licence” as applicable and comply with the requirements of sanitary and hygienic practices specified under the food safety law.

The FSSAI has proposed that school authorities will have to adopt a comprehensive programme for promoting safe food and healthy diets among school children. The school campus should be converted into ‘Eat Right School’ focusing safe and healthy food, local and seasonal food and no food waste as per the specified benchmarks.

“Encourage school authorities to promote consumption of a safe and balanced diet in the school as per the guidelines issued by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN),” the draft regulation said.

The school authorities would have to ensure that FBOs supplying prepared meals in the premises are on the basis of general guidance provided in the regulation and as per the direction issued by the Food Authority or the Commissioners of Food safety.

Nutritionists, dietitians must be engaged by the school administration to assist in the preparation of menu for the children, periodically.

“FBOs to support healthy eating in schools and not market, sell, or give away low- nutrition foods anywhere on school campus, including through logos, brand names, posters, textbook covers etc,” the draft said.

It also prescribes regular inspection of premises to ensure that safe, healthy and hygienic food is served to students. The FSSAI proposes creation of a sub-committee by the State Level Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of this regulations and to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food to school children.

“A healthy food make our kids feel better, grow better and learn better and right eating habits can be engrained in the children from a young age. At the heart of these regulations is a fundamental idea to make it clear what is healthy for children and what is not,” the regulator had said.