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Chennai: As FSSAI proposes junk food ban, schools say curbs in place

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CHENNAI: Amid a push to curb junk food consumption among children, many city schools said they have banned items such as chips, pizza, burgers and some baked products on campus, though they said they can't do much about the sale of unhealthy food in the vicinity of the institutions.

With the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) proposing a ban on foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) in schools and within 50metres of the campuses, principals have welcomed the move.

FSSAI has sought public comments on the draft Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and healthy diets for School Children) Regulations, 2019, which listed several measures for monitoring the quality of food sold and supplied to school children. It advises curbing availability of HFSS foods such as French fries, fried chips, samosa, chola bhatura, gulab jamun, carbonated beverages, confectionery, noodles, pizza and burgers.

“The proposed ban is a good move. We are discouraging packaged food items on our campus,” said Radhika Unni, principal, SBOA School and Junior College, Anna Nagar. “But, there are vendors selling junk food like chaat items near the school after school hours. As it's outside the school, we do not have any control. Everytime we send them away with the help of police, they return after 30minutes,” she said, adding that the school offers healthy items like chappathi and dhal to the students.

P G Subramanian, principal of Bhavan's Rajaji Vidhyashram in Kilpauk said awareness on the ills of junk food is slowly spreading among schools and students. "We cannot eradicate junk food immediately. Many schools are trying to avoid junk food on campus. In our school, we have banned almost 90% of junk food items. But, we cannot do much about their availability outside the school," he said.

However, parents complained that some schools continue to sell food rich in carbohydrates and fat such as pasta and channa samosa in their canteen.

R Srinivasa Raghavan, principal, Bala Vidyamandir Senior Secondary School in Adyar, said banning junk food in schools and within 50metres from the institutions would not yield results. "They say liquor drinking is not good but everywhere we have shops, likewise for tobacco. We will allow the shops and then create awareness. If food items like pizza or burger is not good for health, they should cancel the licence for these shops instead of banning sales in or outside schools," he said.

"As our students are from the neighbourhood, we do not have a canteen. But, we have banned chocolates along with junk food and are creating awareness through the health club among primary, middle and secondary students. Though teachers advise, we can't say students refrain from having junk food," said K Mohana, principal, Modern Senior Secondary School, Nanganallur.

A majority of government schools do not have canteens. But, they are also creating awareness on junk food and its side effects. "Some junk foods can cause severe health complications. So, we advise our students to stop eating packaged food items, including chips and noodles," said R C Saraswathi, headmistress, Government Girls Higher Secondary School in Ashok Nagar.