

## Now serving: Compensation for food poisoning

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Restaurants can no longer dismiss complaints of food poisoning by simply blaming patrons' weak digestive system. They will have to serve up steep compensation or face police action. A new central food safety act, which was implemented in Maharashtra this month, has provisions that allow customers to seek damages up to Rs 10 lakh.



In previous food safety acts, there was no scope for seeking compensation

The only rub, however, is that a complainant will have to prove that the trouble in his/her belly is because of the food eaten at a certain restaurant or outlet.

The Food Safety & Standards Act (FSSA), which was passed by Parliament in 2006, came into effect on August 5. It will regulate manufacturing, storage, distribution, sale and import of food items. The law enables consumers to register complaints and seek prosecution of those behind adulteration.

An official of the state's Food & Drug Administration (FDA) department said that it had started conducting meetings with owners of restaurants and food outlets to make them aware of the new law.

"This act will help consumers in getting compensation from erring restaurants," said Suraj Deshmukh, assistant commissioner (enforcement), FDA. "Restaurant owners who thought they could get away with anything by paying a fine will face a tough time now."

He added cases of food poisoning would be registered under section 65 (compensation in case of injury and death) of the act. Diners will have to follow a series of steps to seek compensation.

They will have to file a complaint with the local police, provide a sample of their vomit and a copy of the bill.

They will also have to submit doctor's certificate confirming the condition.

The new law requires FDA and police officials to complete the probe in 90 days after receiving the complaint. If the case of food poisoning is proved, a restaurant will have to pay up within three months.

The amount of compensation will depend on the severity of food poisoning.

In earlier food safety acts, there was no scope for demanding compensation.