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Tolerance limits' to be fixed by food regulator for presence of antibiotics in animal, foods

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E-Paper

Worried about consuming antibiotics through eggs, meat or milk? You may breathe a sigh of relief. The food regulator has decided to curb use of antibiotics and veterinary drugs to ensure safety of animal products such as processed meat, meat products, poultry and eggs, sea foods and milk.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will soon fix "tolerance limits" for presence of antibiotics in such food items. FSSAI has made changes to the existing Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011. The amendments are likely to be notified by end of this week, official sources said.

The proposed regulations will also require vets and animal owners to ensure that any animal products they produce are drugfree before they can be used as food. The new regulations would also mean enforcement of drug withdrawal period before treated animals, eggs or milk are used for consumption as food. This allows time for the drugs to completely leave the animal's system, an official said. Once the new regulation is in place, FSSAI will do surprise inspections and random sampling to check all such products available in the market do not contain antibiotic residues beyond the permissible limit. The move comes in the wake of concerns related to presence of antibiotics in such animal foods.



While India has been under severe international pressure, overuse of antibiotics in food-producing animals is often blamed for the increase in super bugs. "Antibiotic resistance is a serious problem and animal products are a major source of it. We want to ensure that no contaminated food products are able to enter the food supply," FSSAI chief executive Pawan Kumar Agarwal told TOI

Antibiotics are given to farm animals like cows, pigs and poultry for primarily two reasons – either to treat infections and prevent an illness from spreading or to promote their extra growth. Low doses of antibiotics are mixed with fodder for greater production of meat or milk in a shorter period of time.

These low doses may also reduce death rates and improve reproduction. While resistant bacteria can be passed from food-producing animals to humans, anti-microbial resistance threatens the effective prevention and treatment of an ever-increasing range of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, urinary tract infection (UTI) and even HIV. The government has already initiated several measures to contain misuse of antibiotics in humans. For instance, the campaign — 'Medicines with the Red Line'— which involves packs of certain medicines carrying a 'red line' to differentiate them from other drugs and discouraging unnecessary prescription. Still many antibiotics including some unapproved ones are regularly sold over the counter in India.

India is one of the five BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) that accounted for three quarters of the 36% rise in worldwide antibiotic consumption between 2000 and 2010, according to a 2016 study. That study also found that in the BRICS countries 23% of the increase in retail sales volume of antibiotics was attributable to India.