

Food regulator to curb use of antibiotics in food items

By *Sushmi Dey*

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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 drug-free 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 such products do not contain antibiotic residues beyond the permissible limit.

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“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 two reasons — 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.