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FDA reaching out to schools for creating 'eat right campus'

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Nagpur: The Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), Nagpur, has taken the initiative to approach schools and colleges and make them aware about safe food practices and create 'eat right campus'.

Under the nationwide campaign initiated by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the FDA officials need to inform schools and colleges about healthy food practices and ensure that their canteens don't serve unhealthy, junk food full of fats, sugar, salt and excessive calories.

FDA Nagpur's joint commissioner CB Pawar told TOI that FDA has contacted 181 schools and colleges in the city so far. Workshops were conducted in 14 schools and colleges and 2,052 students were directly told about healthy food practices.

"FDA teams in Maharashtra have given the responsibility to implement two campaigns. First is to make educational institutions aware of guidelines for providing wholesome and nutritious food to children. Second is guidelines on food safety, hygiene and sanitation for food available in school canteens. Visits, workshops, and inspections will continue as schools have now re-opened after Diwali vacations," said Pawar.

In October, the FDA observed Food Safety and Awareness Fortnight. "Our teams conducted joint meetings with principals, canteen owners, and teachers in 14 schools between October 2 and 16. A dietitian and nutritionist were with us in the meeting. We will continue this drive," Pawar added.

According to dietician Sachin Wankhede, childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. "Overweight children are likely to become obese adults. They are more likely than non-overweight children to develop insulin resistance, hyperinsulinemia, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age. So, it's good to spread awareness at school level only," he said.

Speaking on the need to restrict availability of junk food in and around schools, management researcher Nitin Todkar said that it's the most important step for future. "According to an assessment by CRISIL, fast food restaurant market is increasingly expanding to Tier-II and Tier-III cities. Spending per middle class household at such restaurants is expected to increase 1.5 times by 2022-23. In such a case, it's important to educate children about what is healthy for them and what is dangerous," he said.