

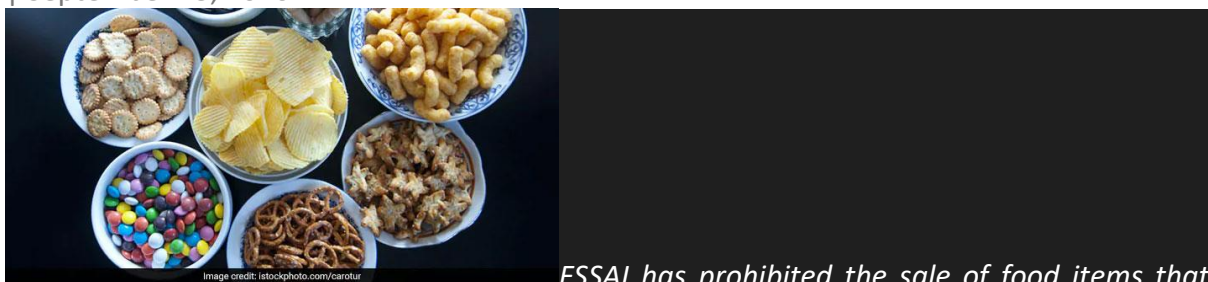


# POSHAN Maah 2020: Food Safety Regulator Bans Selling Of Junk Food To Schoolchildren To Inculcate The Habit Of Healthy Eating

According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's new regulations, food items that are high in saturated fat or trans-fat or added sugar or sodium like chips, burgers, soft drinks cannot be sold in canteens and within 50 metres of the premises schools and other educational institutions

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*FSSAI has prohibited the sale of food items that are high in saturated fat or trans-fat or with added sugar or sodium in school premises and within 50 metres of the school gate*

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The aim is to ensure that school children get safe, wholesome food: FSSAI
- It is a necessary ban, children must be given only healthy choices: Teacher
- Schools need to promote balanced diets amongst school children: FSSAI

**New Delhi:** During the pre-COVID times, when Saumya, a student of Class 4, used to go to school the lunch break used to be the highlight of her day. Eating and playing with her friends, is what she misses the most now that the schools are shut. Another thing that she misses equally is her visits to the school canteen. Every time, when she used to find a

vegetable in her lunch box that she was not fond of, she simply used to decide on not eating it and marched happily into her school canteen with pocket money in her hand and came out with a large burger full of cheese and potato. Now, right when the governments were mulling over reopening of schools, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued an order which restricts the sale of junk and unhealthy food in canteens of schools and other educational institutions. It has prohibited the sale of all kinds of foods that are high in saturated fat, trans-fat, added sugar or sodium within 50 metres of the school gate. According to Arun Singhal, Chief Executive Officer, FSSAI, the aim is to inculcate right eating habits in children since early childhood. He said,

If they start young then they can continue their habits later on. The regulation says that high fat, salt and sugar products which are commonly referred to as junk food will not be sold and will not be marketed/ advertised in campuses of schools and in areas within 50 meters of the school gate. So, this is one regulation which is going to ensure that healthy food/nutritious food is made available in school canteens and the children start having healthy food at a very young age.

He further said that providing healthy options to choose from is the responsibility of the businesses. The FSSAI's regulation is in line with the government's pledge to cap trans fats to meet the World Health Organisation's target of a trans-fats free world by 2023.

According to an official at FSSAI, for implementing the ban, all the food business operators in schools and within 50 metres of the premise will be given 180 days to comply with the regulations. FSSAI has also asked states to create a State Level Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of these regulations and to ensure the availability of safe and wholesome food to school children. The violators will be penalised under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006 as follows:

- Any person or business selling a food product that is not in compliance with the regulations of FSSAI is liable to a penalty of Rs. 5 lakh.
- If the food business operator or food product importer fails to comply with the prerequisites of the rules and regulations laid by statutory authority is liable to a penalty up to Rs. 2 lakh.
- Any person who, whether by himself or by any other person on his behalf, manufactures or processes any article of food for human consumption under unhygienic or unsanitary conditions, he shall be liable to pay a penalty which may extend to Rs. 1 lakh.

Various state food authorities and public authorities like municipal corporations or panchayats will also conduct surveillance to ensure compliance of the regulations issued by FSSAI. Regular inspection of premises to ensure that safe, balanced and hygienic food is served to students and a Health and Wellness Ambassador Health and Wellness team may be appointed as the nodal persons to monitor the availability of safe, balanced and hygienic food. Ganesh Kandwal Designated Officer, Dehradun said,

Eating junk food can lead to many problems including high blood sugar. This will not only impact a child's present learning but will also put their entire future in peril. The world is already under a huge burden of non-communicable diseases that are resulted from poor eating choices. The pandemic has also reminded the importance of eating right and building

a stronger internal immunity. We are going to ensure that the regulations are followed properly in the state.

### **School Canteens, Mid-Day Meal Kitchens Now Need To Get FSSAI License To Operate**

According to FSSAI's regulations, the school authorities that are selling or catering school meals and the contractors hired by the Department of School Education for operations of mid-day meal schemes must obtain a license and comply with sanitary and hygienic practices. It further says that school authorities must ensure that caterers supplying prepared meals in the premises are on the basis of regulation and as per the direction issued by the Food Authority or the Commissioners of Food safety. The FSSAI suggests schools to engage nutritionists and dietitians in the preparation of the menu for the children. It calls for converting school campuses into 'Eat Right Campus' focusing on the provision of safe and healthy food, local and seasonal food and developing practices amongst kids on food waste as per the specified benchmarks.

The regulations further state that school authority should ensure that a board containing warning "Do not sell (including free sale or market or advertise) the food products high in saturated fat or trans-fat or added sugar or sodium within school premises or campus" in English or one Indian language, as applicable, is displayed prominently at the entrance gate or gates of the school.

While talking about the regulation on junk food, Preeti Sharma, a teacher at Delhi Public School, Haridwar highlighted the lack of awareness among parents. She said,

Healthy and balanced diet leads to the development of the cognitive ability of children and help them learn better and grow healthy. Keeping this in mind, our school administration banned the sale of chips on the campus. However, we observed that even after the ban, children were bringing chips from home. This is mainly because there is a lack of awareness about the importance of nutrition among people. Habits are not built in one day and certainly not by restricting children from eating something. Habits are built by consistently providing them with healthy food and teaching them by example by eating well ourselves, as parents and as teachers. Nutrition is something, people tend to ignore which was evident from the fact that when we organise workshops for parents on nutrition occasionally and just a few parents participate. So, I think along with banning junk food from school and areas around the school, it is important that people are made sensitised towards the importance of good nutrition for a child's development.

Sonal Chauhan, mother of Mohit, a student of Class 11, welcomed the ban and said that her son and many other students in his class did not prefer taking home-cooked meals to school and so almost every day they consumed junk food. She said,