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'40% of slaughter houses fail to meet hygiene norms'

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NEW DELHI: Slaughter houses have come under the scanner of the food safety regulator with around 40% of those inspected in the first phase failing compliance. To ensure supply of clean and safe meat, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has started audits and inspections of slaughter houses that supply fresh meat to shops across the country.

"There is a huge concern about hygiene and safety of meat and meat products as there is an unprecedented increase in the demand for animal proteins, not only in India but globally as well. To ensure safety, we have started with slaughter houses that supply fresh meat but we will audit all kinds of facilities and products manufactured from there, including processed and packaged meat," FSSAI chief executive Pawan Agarwal told TOI.

There are nearly 486 government licensed slaughter houses. Of this, around 306 have been permitted by state governments whereas 178 are licensed by the Centre. The regulator has so far inspected only 25 of these units in the first phase through a third party agency, of which 11 were found non-compliant, failing on criteria like cleanliness, hygiene and pest control. Even some animals were found having infectious diseases, officials said.

In the second phases, FSSAI proposes to conduct food safety audit of all central and state licensed slaughter houses to assess compliance with prescribed standards. Agarwal said inspection of these 486 units is likely to be completed in six months and FSSAI may review action accordingly.

The regulator has issued improvement notices to units that have failed to meet safety standards and may order shutdown of these slaughter houses if they still fail to comply with the norms. It has also written to state food commissioners asking them to be vigilant and conduct special drives for inspections of all slaughter houses in their state.