

## Street food vendors to be trained in hygiene, social distancing

The training of Delhi's street food vendors will be based on guidelines prepared by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for food businesses during the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic.

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The training of Delhi's street food vendors is likely to start from next week and over 500 street food vendors will be trained in the first phase. (Photo by Tribhuvan Sharma/ Hindustan Times)

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Eating street food will not be the same when the lockdown is lifted. To prepare Delhi's street food vendors for the new normal, the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) has decided to train them in the measures they need to take while selling food.

The training will focus on keeping a separate table next to the cart from where customers can collect food, keeping a water dispenser, wearing protective gear, using disinfectants to keep the cart clean, opting for online payment, home deliveries in nearby areas among other things.

The training will be based on guidelines prepared by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for food businesses during the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic.

Sangeeta Singh, head of the street food programme at NASVI, said street vendors will have to get used to the “new normal to earn their livelihood”. While there were close to 1.45 lakh authorised street vendors as per government records based on surveys done in 2007 and 2011, their exact number now is not known as no survey has taken place in the recent past. According to NASVI, there are over three lakh vendors (approximately) in Delhi.

The training guidelines for vendors state that high-touch points (surfaces that are touched the most number of times) have to be cleaned twice daily using disinfectants such as sodium hypochlorite. “Vendors will now have to use these disinfectants to keep their carts clean. They will also have to wear proper protective gear, provide customers with water dispensers and make arrangement to regularly sanitise their hands. We will teach them about hand hygiene, social distancing, etc., which are essential today,” Singh said.

Shyam Sunder (65), a street food vendor at Harkesh Nagar in Okhla, is unsure whether he can immediately go back to selling fritters near the Metro station after May 17. “I will have to buy a lot of things, such as disinfectants, to keep the cart clean. But I don’t know if people would prefer to eat on the roadside. The government should help us restart our businesses,” Sunder said.

Subhash (who goes by his first name), another street food vendor near Pragati Maidan, is also uncertain about his livelihood. “We don’t know when the lockdown will be lifted and we will be allowed to put up our stalls. There is a lot of uncertainty. My brother had started selling vegetable during the lockdown to feed the family, but we discontinued it later due the rise in Covid cases in the Azadpur Mandi,” Subhash said.

The training is likely to start from next week and over 500 street food vendors will be trained in the first phase, Sangeeta Singh said.

She said vendors, especially those selling street food, will be the worst affected, as people will be reluctant to eat on the road fearing Covid-19. “Earlier, we would try to teach them about

the importance of hygiene while cooking. But now the vendors are eager to know what they can do to revive their business. They have suffered a lot in the last one-and-a-half months,” she said.

Arbind Singh, executive director of NASVI, said that the Delhi government and municipal agencies should now create dedicated vending zones as mandated in the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, and also prepare a plan for street vendors once the lockdown is lifted.

“The creation of dedicated vending zones will help ensure social distancing. We will request the government to prepare a plan for street vendors, including food vendors. As and when the lockdown is lifted, street vending will need the government’s support in reviving their businesses,” he said.

A senior Delhi government official looking after the issues of street vendors in the Capital said, “There can’t be a common rule for all the areas in Delhi now due to Covid-19. The plans will be area-specific. We will ask the district magistrates to ensure that social distancing is maintained whenever vendors are allowed to operate. We will prepare a detailed plan once we get some guidelines from the Centre in this regard.”