

Press Release

IRRESPONSIBLE ADVERTISING A MATTER OF GRAVE CONCERN: FSSAI

New Delhi, 22nd November 2019: Advertising and marketing plays a key role in people making food choices, particularly children, FSSAI expresses deep concern about irresponsible advertising and marketing by food companies. WHO in its resolution on marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children has asked the member-states to reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. It also recommends that given the effectiveness of marketing is a function of exposure and power, the overall policy objective should be to reduce both the exposure of children to, and power of, marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt.

Aligned with the WHO advice, FSSAI has recently finalized the 'Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018'. Under these regulations, the advertisements should not undermine the importance of healthy lifestyles, and also shall not promote or portray their food & beverages as a meal replacement unless otherwise specifically permitted by FSSAI. Further, no advertisements or claims for articles of foods shall be made by any food business operator that undermines the products of any other manufacturer for the purpose of promoting their products or influencing consumer behavior. Violation of these regulations attracts a penalty up to ten lakh rupees under Section (53) of Food Safety & Standards Act, 2006.

FSSAI is also in the process of finalizing regulations to ensure safe and wholesome food for school children. A key proposal in the regulations is that foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar cannot be sold to school children in school canteens / mess premises / hostel kitchens or within 50 meters of the school campus. Unhealthy diets are a key risk factor in childhood obesity that is rising rapidly. Diets that have excess of salt and sugar not only harm the body but also the cognitive capabilities of the children. Therefore, at the heart of the proposed regulations is a fundamental idea to make it clear what is healthy for children and what is not and promote healthy eating habits amongst the children. These regulations are in draft stage under consultation.

In the above context, FSSAI has noted with concern incidences of irresponsible advertising by some food companies to promote sales of their own foods often considered unhealthy as substitute for healthy foods. A full page advertisement by McDonald in newspapers said, "*Stuck with Ghiya-Tori Again? Make the 1+1 Combo you love*". Central licensing authority and FSSAI's designated officer at New Delhi and

Mumbai have taken cognizance of this and issued show cause notices for contravening the provisions of Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018 as to why further action should not be initiated against McDonald' for this.

Tendency of the food companies to disparage freshly cooked food and vegetables that are healthier is a matter of grave concern. Such advertisements are against national efforts for promoting healthier and right eating habits, especially in the children from a young age, with the aim to ensure safe and wholesome food for them so that the kids feel better, grow better and learn better.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) represent a leading threat to human health and socioeconomic development. As per WHO report NCDs kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally and each year, 15 million people die from a NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years; over 85% of these "premature" deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. NCDs threaten progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a target of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one-third by 2030.

The unhealthy diet is a key modifiable risk factor for NCDs and unless addressed, unhealthy diets — in conjunction with other risk factors — increase NCD prevalence in populations through raised blood pressure, raised blood glucose, abnormal blood lipids and overweight/obesity. While deaths from NCDs primarily occur in adulthood, the risks associated with unhealthy diet begin in childhood and build up throughout life.

In recent times, Singapore has banned advertisement for the unhealthy sugary drinks in its latest move to combat rising diabetes rates, the health ministry said Thursday. Products deemed "less healthy" are now required to display labels grading their nutritional and sugar content, with those considered to be most unhealthy banned from appearing in ads across all media platforms, including broadcast, print and online channels. This aims to reduce the influence of such advertisements on consumer preferences.

Commenting on this development, Pawan Agarwal, CEO FSSAI said that the food companies must desist from issuing advertisements/publicity materials which are in violation of Food Safety & Standards Act, 2006 and rules/regulations made thereunder. He added that FSSAI is committed to ensure the availability of safe and wholesome food for all citizens of the country through various means like education, awareness building and regulatory enforcement and to achieve these goals the Eat Right campaign is going on across the country.

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