

Food safety: 40 squads deployed across the State

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Onam special drive to focus on quality of milk, edible oil

The Food Safety Department has deployed 40 special squads across the State for ensuring availability of safe food and adherence of hygienic and sanitary practices by food business operators during this Onam season.

The squads deployed in various district circles for carrying out special raids have been put under the charge of two Joint Commissioners of Food Safety holding the charge of Administration, Legal and Vigilance and Enforcement respectively. No squad member will be granted leave except with the sanction of the authority concerned.

“We have identified some areas and food items to be focused during this festive season special drive,” M.G. Rajamanickam, Food Safety Commissioner, told The Hindu . The designated officers have been asked to impose fine and compound offences invoking Sections 69 and 49 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. Legal action will be taken against food business operators unwilling to pay the fine.

The government analysts of respective labs have been asked to deploy sufficient officers to analyse samples received through the special drive, including on holidays. Deputy Director (Prevention of Food Adulteration) will personally monitor and supervise the entire analytical work during the special drive.

A 15-point guideline has been drawn up for the functioning of the squads, which have already hit the road and will be active till just before Onam. Apart from scrupulous inspection of hotels, restaurants, bakeries and other manufacturing units and wayside

eateries, they have been asked to accord special focus on the quality of milk, edible oil (especially coconut oil), pappadam, payasam mix, jaggery, ghee, vegetables, fruits, meat, tea, and cereals.

Wayside eateries

Food safety officers will operate along with the Dairy Development Department officers at check-posts to ensure the safety of milk brought from neighbouring States. A list of wayside eateries, including 'thattukadas', ordered to be closed down by the special squads will be provided at the nearest police station.

Licences of food business establishments operating under unhygienic conditions will be suspended. The squads have been asked to collect drinking water samples from sources near residences and places of accommodation of migrant workers for microbiological analysis.

Penal action will be taken against those found using banned items such as newspapers for packing food items. Photographs and videos of raids conducted have been asked to send to the food safety commissionerate. Daily reports of raids complete with a consolidated report of fines collected should be submitted without fail.

One food safety officer, a clerk and an office assistant will be present at every district headquarters during holidays for attending complaints.