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E-Paper

Colour-coded school food [G.S. Mudur](#)

New Delhi: India's food-safety regulator has proposed colour-coded rules to discourage certain "red" food, including samosas, French fries, ready-to-eat noodles and burgers, from school canteens and encourage "green" food such as wholegrain cereals, legumes, lean meat, fish and eggs.

The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has sought "suggestions from stakeholders" on proposed rules that will require school administrations to ensure their canteens operate through licences and adhere to a colour-coded scheme and curb sales of high fat, sugar and salt food.

The rules discourage red-coded food from school canteens, hostel kitchens and from being sold within 50 metres of school premises. State food authorities will be tasked with surveillance and inspections to ensure schools comply with the rules that also specify safety and hygiene requirements - for premises, utensils, food handlers and raw materials.

The proposals come amid concerns about growing prevalence of overweight and obesity among adolescents.

A 2016 review published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research* had found that prevalence of overweight adolescents had increased from about 10 per cent before 2001 to 14 per cent after 2010.

"Controls on the food served in schools in our country has been long, long overdue," said Sitanshu Sekhar Kar, an additional professor of social and preventive medicine at the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry.

"Students may cite examples of what is served in schools to justify what they wish to consume outside school - parents trying to discourage children from certain food in a supermarket may find themselves told that the same food are available in school," he said.

A senior FSSAI official said the proposed colour-coded scheme was drawn up on the basis of suggestions from an independent panel of experts in nutrition and health that the authority had constituted.

The rules will also require food handlers in school canteens and kitchens to wear clean aprons, head gear and hand gloves, and undergo periodic medical tests to rule out

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infectious diseases. They will also need to refrain from eating, chewing, smoking, spitting or nose blowing while handling food.

The canteen and kitchen staff would also need to ensure that the premises are free of insects and flies, the kitchen ceiling is free from flaking plaster, and utensils are not broken or cracked.

The rules also say state food authorities should "motivate schools" to adopt a comprehensive health-promotion programme and adopt a rating system that would recognise schools with high health standards and encourage other schools to follow suit.