



FSSAI issues guidance document on use of supplements intended for athletes

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FSSAI issued a guidance document on the use of supplements/products intended for sportspersons recently. It provides an overview about the regulatory status and available provisions made in the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011, as well as in the National Anti-Doping Agency's (NADA) anti-doping rule.

This is in the wake of reports of supplements laced and spiked with banned substances which are unknown to the consumers and result in the unintentional use of prohibited substances, which can otherwise can be harmful to health.

NADA's rule imposes a strict liability clause upon the sportspersons, wherein the use of prohibited substances is strictly prohibited and considered unethical. And in such cases, the sportspersons face term bans.

The primary purpose of the guidance document was to provide information not only on the use, but also about the labelling and claims for the products.

"The stakeholders who will use the information provided in the document include sportspersons, supplement manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers and the general public," stated the document.

Vaibhav Kulkarni, chairman, technical and regulatory committee and board member, Health and Dietary Supplement Association (HADSA), said, "With an increase in sporting activities, the guidance document will have a positive impact on the player's nutritional system."

"While sports nutrition had not been very specifically addressed and its categorisation is very unclear, The present guidance clears many ambiguities," he added.

"The document categorises the sports nutrition product under the existing regulation. More importantly, it explains substances which are completely banned and those during the competition. This will immensely help the sportspersons to keep away from banned substances," Kulkarni added.

"The document will also support the manufacturers in producing World Anti-Doping Agency- (WADA) compliant products. The document is a single window of useful information to sportspersons," he said.

He added that the guideline was a good beginning and will evolve over a period of time. As it is a

guideline and not a regulation, making changes is easier.

It really addresses the banned substances in sports nutrition in a very comprehensive manner. However, since the guideline has been just released and is being studied by all stakeholders, it is too early to rate it.

For this, FSSAI and NADA have collaborated, and under the collaboration, India's apex food regulator has already issued a circular to all food safety commissioners for appropriate enforcement and surveillance to ensure the compliance with regard to the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011.

The current regulation process for the manufacturers, including registration and licensing with FSSAI, labelling and claims, authenticity, traceability and date marking, have been mentioned in the document.

For the better understanding of the document, the appendices list is being provided. It includes the definitions, frequently-asked questions (FAQs) and list of prohibited substances and methods issued by WADA (which is revised annually, and is effective from January 1 every year).

The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) and dietary guidelines has also been provided in the document.

Meanwhile, Kulkarni suggested that there was a bit confusion about the category under which the guidelines should come.

He explained, "There are a few issues in the guideline which need to be addressed. In the main guideline, all sports nutrition products have directed to be categorised under Foods for Special Dietary Uses (FSDU) in the nutra regulation."

"However, in the FAQ section, it has been proposed that sports nutrition products are be categorised under health supplements. This is confusing though," Kulkarni added.

"Health supplements would be more appropriate. FSDU is for special physiological conditions, and sporting activity or performance cannot be termed as a physiological condition," he said.

"Sports nutrition or sports supplements have been categorised into sports food, medical supplements and performance supplements. This is not required as these aspects will be taken care of by the claims," Kulkarni added.

"The ministry of youth affairs and sports has suggested a few generic names for sports nutrition. As this is likely to cause confusion, the categorisation will be left to FSSAI," he added.