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E-PAPER

YOUR MONEY CAN BUY YOU DISEASES, SAYS FSSAI

By Brendan Dabhi



FDCA to soon issue guidelines, preventive measures

The ubiquitous currency that you handle on a daily basis from the roadside panipuriwala to the cashier or your sabziwala can be the cause of food poisoning, skin, respiratory and gastro infections. Handling of currency with unclean and soiled hands, use of saliva during counting and storage under unhygienic conditions leads to its contamination with harmful microorganisms, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has said.

FSSAI has directed states to initiate a systematic drive to raise awareness amongst citizens to discourage simultaneous handling of food and currency notes/coins. Now, the Food and Drugs Control Authority (FDCA) in Gujarat has begun developing guidelines and programmes for vendors to ensure that spread of germs, especially bacteria and fungi, through currency is mitigated.

While there is no plan currently in place to mitigate such spread, FDCA has assured that concrete steps will be taken to ensure 'hygiene education' among vendors and citizens. Gautam Dalvadi, designated food officer of FDCA for Zone-2 Ahmedabad told Mirror,

FSSAI IN NEWS

“We will soon issue guidelines to vendors and spread awareness about germs being spread through currency.”

What

research

says

Research at various times have pointed at disease causing, drug-resistant pathogens on currency notes and warned of their risk of transmitting diseases. Professor Arun Arya, officiating head of Department of Environmental Studies and former head of Botany at MS University in Vadodara who has researched this topic told Mirror, “When we carried out our sample study a few years ago, though we did not find any major diseases, we did find fungi on the currency that can cause allergies and skin problems. E Coli and Salmonella are primary among them.”

The Regional Sophisticated Instrumentation Center (RSIC), India, that had examined currency notes found germs that can cause tuberculosis, meningitis, tonsillitis, peptic ulcers, throat infections and genital tract infections. Another report published in Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences in 2016, over 86 per cent of currency notes tested at Tirunelveli Medical College, Tamil Nadu, were contaminated with disease causing pathogens.


The currency notes were collected from local markets, students, housewives, doctors and banks. Doctors’ warning Dr Kamlesh Upadhyay, Head of Medicine at Civil Hospital Asarwa who was at the forefront in helping control the swine flu epidemic in Gujarat in 2015 told Mirror, “There are two ways that diseases can spread through currency. First through foodstuff that are contaminated.

Water may be impure or food may be left uncovered. Second, the vendor may have disease or the vendor’s hands may be unclean. These things make it easy to contract germs through currency.” On what types of diseases can be spread through such means, Dr Upadhyay said, “From the common cold, flu and food poisoning, it can go up to tuberculosis, Hepatitis A and C as well as other air-borne diseases.”

On precautions that can be taken by consumers while purchasing food from vendors, Dr Kalpesh Talati, physician at Zydus Hospital said, “People need to clean their hands while handling currency and wherever possible, even ask the vendors to do so. Bacteria on currency is more dangerous as it can be transmitted faster and remain for a longer time.”

Asked what the FDCA is planning to do to help mitigate the situation, Dalvadi said, “Primarily, we are looking at educating vendors in better hygiene practices and ensure that those serving food do not handle currency but have another assistant do the same. However, we do understand that not every snack vendor can afford an assistant and so we are still planning what to do in such cases.”

NOTES GIVE DISEASES



WHAT FSSAI SAYS

Cross Contamination from currency is risk to human health leading to a wide variety of diseases including food poisoning and skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal infections.

WHAT'S IN CURRENCY

- E. COLI**
Commonly known to cause diarrrhea, this bacteria may also lead to urinary tract infection kidney failure in extreme cases
- ASPERGILLUS**
Fungus that harms the lungs by causing a disease known as aspergillous
- ACID FAST BACILLI**
TB causing bacteria
- HEPATITIS A VIRUS**
This virus spreads by consuming food contaminated with infected faeces
- SALMONELLA & SHIGELLA**
Diarrhoea, typhoid fever and dysentery causing bacteria
- ASCARIS EGG**
The parasite causes worm infestations. Ascaris egg is commonly found in the human faeces
- INFLUENZA VIRUS**
It is spread by touching surfaces contaminated by the virus and then touching the mouth or eyes

TIPS

1. Handle currency with clean hands
2. Keep currency dry
3. Ask vendors to clean hands
4. Clean hands after handling currency

NOTES GIVE DISEASES

