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There should be strict implementation of food safety laws: Health minister

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New Delhi, Aug 23 () Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday said there should be strict implementation of food safety laws to ensure safe and wholesome food to people.

This was stated by the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare at the inauguration of state-of-the-art National Food Laboratory (NFL) Delhi-NCR of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) at Ghaziabad. Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Kumar Choubey, FSSAI Chairperson Rita Teotia, FSSAI's CEO Pawan Agarwal were also present.

"We not only have to provide right food, but also ensure that there is strict implementation of laws and the compliance of standards to assure that citizens have safe and wholesome food," Vardhan was quoted as saying in an official statement.

The minister also laid the foundation stone of the FSSAI Tower, envisaged to accommodate not only additional manpower but also host visiting faculty and trainee officers during trainings and conferences.

"Over the past 7-8 years, the authority has transformed the food safety ecosystem in the country with the support of our stakeholders. NFL (Delhi-NCR) is one of the most advanced laboratories in the country and is at par with any other laboratory in advanced countries like USA," Agarwal said.

Stating that health is one of the top priorities of the government, Vardhan said, "This could be gauged from the fact that there is now a network of food testing laboratories established in the country and recognised by FSSAI. Such laboratories have increased to 261 as of now from 138 during the year 2014".

The minister said Ayushman Bharat Yojana is benefitting millions since its launch last year. He further added that with 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres coming up by the year 2022, quality health care will reach every doorstep in the country.

The government is expanding quality tertiary health care facilities in all parts of the country, Vardhan said, adding that the total number of AIIMS would now go up to 22 in the country.

"FSSAI has brought out a simple lab in a box which is named Food Safety Magic Box with a compilation of 101 easy tests. It will serve as a best pedagogical tool to educate children about the concept of safe food," the minister said.

Vardhan presented the Uttar Pradesh government two 'Food Safety on Wheels (FSW) vans' to cater to the food testing requirements in Ghaziabad and western UP. He said that 500 such food safety and testing vans would be available in near future to support the states in ensuring food safety.

The National Food Laboratory (NFL), Delhi-NCR, formerly Food Research & Standardized Laboratory (FRSL), is one of the two premier referral laboratories under the direct administrative control of FSSAI.

NFL, renovated and operationalised under a unique public-private partnership model, is the first of its kind venture in the food sector. It houses collaborative training centres namely the Food Safety Solution Centre (FSSC) and the Centre for Microbiological Analysis Training (C-MAT). FSSAI will set up NFLs at Mumbai and Chennai in the near future along the same lines.

This national lab is a result of a PPP with Arbro Pharmaceutical, the pharma company said in a separate statement.

Saurabh Arora, founder, Arbro Pharmaceuticals, said, "Together with FSSAI, We have built a world-class laboratory with upgraded infrastructure which will be able to conduct international level of food testing".