KOCHI: In a major initiative to promote healthy food habits among children at school, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) – an autonomous body established under the central ministry of health & family welfare – has come up a new directive to ban the sale of junk foods in and around schools as part of its ‘Eat Right’ campaign.

In the draft regulation –titled Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and healthy diets for School Children) Regulations 2019 – FSSAI proposed a 10-point charter to clamp down on unhealthy eating habits of students. The charter said foods which are referred to as foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) cannot be sold to school children in canteens, mess, hostel or shops within a 50m radius.
FSSAI also directed state food authorities/departments of school education to frame healthy diet for students in accordance with the points mentioned in the notification.

FSSAI said the availability of HFSS foods like french fries, fried chips, samosa, chola bhatura, gulab jamun, sugar sweetened carbonated or non-carbonated beverages, ready-to-eat food, noodles, pizzas, burgers, confectionery items, sugar and sugar-based products should be discouraged.

FSSAI also directed state food authorities/departments of school education to frame healthy diet for students in accordance with the points mentioned in the notification. It asked the state-level advisory committee to form a subcommittee to monitor the implementation of regulations and ensure inspections.

But, a senior official said the food safety department has not received an official communication from FSSAI. “Once we get a formal directive, we will be bound to implement
the same. Schools too will have to take steps to follow regulations. The state, being one of the first to implement restrictions on tobacco near school campus, will take proactive steps in this regard,” he said. Food safety commissioner Rathan Kelkar, who is away on training, was unavailable for comments.

The charter also stated the advertising of HFSS food products in school premises or within a 50m radius will not be permitted. “Food business operators (FBO) should not market, sell, or give low-nutrition foods anywhere on school campus,” it said.

It added that schools will no longer get sponsorship for events from FBOs so that they can’t use their logos on banners at field meets or issue wallpapers for school computers/canteens.

Schools or agencies selling or catering school meals under the midday meal scheme must obtain a registration or licence as specified under schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) regulations, 2011. Nutritionists, dieticians may be engaged, periodically, by schools to assist preparation of menu for children.

FSSAI has also invited suggestions and objections from stakeholders within 30 days from the publication of the draft regulations, based on which it would be finalized for implementation.