

Food safety onus on SDOs

A.S.R.P. Mukesh Aug 26, 2018

Ranchi: The state health department on Saturday issued a notification making subdivisional rank officers responsible for ensuring food safety in each district.

Currently, doctors (read additional chief medical officers at Sadar hospitals) act as designated officers for food safety. Food inspectors work under them.

However, barring special drives and festivals, collection and sampling don't take place regularly.

"Civil surgeon and doctors in district hospitals are burdened with too many projects and programmes under the National Health Mission that have rigorous timelines. They are often unable to take their regulatory duties seriously. SDOs are more skilled and capable," principal health secretary Nidhi Khare, who signed the notification, told **The Telegraph**.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, a health department official said an SDO or SDM had magisterial powers and were mostly IAS officers. Therefore, having them at the helm of proper regulatory implementation will have an impact.

"We are slowly moving in that direction where doctors will only do their core job while the administrative tasks will be handled by those who are meant to do so. We implemented it in RIMS first, followed by PMCH in Dhanbad and MGM in Jamshedpur. Now, we are expanding it to other sectors of the health department to streamline things," he added.

State food analyst and in-charge of Namkum-based state food laboratory Chatturbhuj Meena said the notification was long overdue.

"All this while, regular sampling/collection wasn't being done regularly the doctors either didn't take much interest or didn't have the time. The notification will make a difference. Orders from SDOs would compel food inspectors to act even if they are busy," Meena said.

The state is still reeling under the crisis of food safety inspectors. Except Ranchi and East Singhbhum, no other district has full-time food safety officers.

"Twenty-four more food safety officers are expected to be recruited soon. This will further strengthen our efforts," he said.

Lens on milk quality

A drive to check the quality of milk and milk products across the state is expected to kick off from September.

Meena said a Hyderabad-based laboratory, Vimta Labs, had been mandated by the Centre to conduct nationwide tests. "The tests couldn't begin in Jharkhand because the lone mobile food lab was deployed in Deoghar for the last one month because of Shravani mela. We are planning to begin it from the first week of September and a team from the lab will arrive by then," he said.