

Staples' fortification voluntary, says FSSAI to food business operators

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FSSAI has clarified to FBOs (food business operators) that the fortification of staples is voluntary, saying that only if any staple is claimed to be fortified, it has to conform to the norms prescribed by the apex food regulator.

Citing confusion amongst the FBOs, FSSAI has released a detailed response on several of the concerns, including whether food fortification is mandatory or voluntary.

FSSAI, in a statement, has said, "There seems to be some confusion on whether fortification is mandatory. It is clarified that fortification continues to be voluntary. However, if any staple claims to be fortified, the standards as notified have to be followed. The intent is to ensure that the interest of the consumer is protected, and the +F logo can only be used if the staple is fortified as per the regulations."

It has also stated that food fortification was a scientifically-proven strategy to address the micronutrient deficiencies and studies showed improved health conditions after fortification intervention.

The apex food regulator has also clarified that the food fortification is not a replacement strategy of balanced diversified diets but a complementary strategy to fill in the gaps.

Further, FSSAI stated that Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018, distinctly mentioned that the package (label) of food fortified with iron, i.e., wheat flour, maida, rice and double-fortified salt shall carry a mandatory declaration - "People with thalassemia may take under medical supervision".

It has also addressed the sentiments of vegetarian people, saying that the fortificants that are used are of plant origin, and hence good for all, without conflicting with religious/cultural beliefs of people.

“In particular, for Vitamin D, the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018, clearly mentions the source of nutrient as only from plant source,” said the statement issued by the FSSAI.

Moreover, addressing the cost factor of the fortification, which was raised by many industries, FSSAI stated that the incremental cost of food fortification was minimal (Rs 0.02 per litre of milk, Rs 0.10 per kg of wheat flour and Rs 0.10 per kg of edible oil).

It is pertinent to mention here that the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018, have been notified in the Gazette of India on August 2, 2018, which replaced the standards operationalised earlier.

The new standards now provide a minimum and a maximum range for fortification of staples like wheat flour (atta), maida, rice (with iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12), double-fortified salt (with iodine and iron), vegetable oil and milk (with Vitamin A and Vitamin D); the dosage of the micronutrients has been adjusted so that they provide 30 to 50 per cent of the daily requirements. In wheat flour and rice fortification, bioavailable sources of iron have been added. Further, vanaspati fortification has been excluded.