

FSSAI to roll out e-inspection of high-risk food businesses

Updated: 03 May 2022, 11:43 PM IST

NEW DELHI: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has opted for a complete overhaul of its inspection mechanism for restaurants and food chains, including virtual inspections through videos and images of outlets.

The food regulator has identified eight categories of food as high risk for which inspections will be mandatory. They include dairy, meat, fish egg, and food items intended for nutritional use, prepared food, Indian sweets and nutrients, and related preparations such as fortified rice kernels.

"An inspection plan has been framed, based on the risks associated with the food businesses, to enable the authorities to carry out the mandatory inspections of the premises of the food business operators (FBOs) for high-risk food categories in a more systematic and intensive manner," Inoshi Sharma, executive director, compliance strategy, FSSAI, said in an order to food commissioners of all states and Union territories, dated 2 May.

"Commissioners of food safety of all states and Union territories must ensure strict implementation of the inspection plan and monitor the progress of inspections. They will also review the pendency, if any, regularly so that targeted inspections shall be conducted with the timeline as specified," he said. A copy of the communiqué was reviewed by Mint.

In the new inspection protocol, FSSAI has also listed provisions for exemptions from inspection, such as the scoring system by third-party audit firms or a hygiene rating scheme.

It said if an FBO obtained 80%-plus score in FSSAI's third party audit, the inspection by food safety officer can be exempted for two financial years.

"These inspections can be conducted in a pre-informed manner rather than in the form of raids and searches. However, the designated officer can do a surprise inspection if there is information regarding serious food safety or an outbreak of food borne illness," Arun Singhal, CEO, FSSAI, said in an interview. Pre-licence inspection is mandatory for manufacturers/processors of milk and milk products, meat and meat products, fish and fish products and slaughter houses, while for fortified rice kernels both pre- licence and registration inspection is required.