FSSAI Norms Against Fast Food

What is the issue?

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has notified a draft regulation against fast food.
- It aims at prohibiting the sale and advertisement of food rich in fat, sugar and salt to schoolchildren inside the school premises and within 50 m around it.

Why this move is taken now?

- It comes in response to the **2015 order from the Delhi High Court** directing the central agency to frame norms to promote healthy diets in schools.
- Besides prohibiting the sale of junk food, the FSSAI requires schools to simultaneously encourage and promote a safe and balanced diet.

What are the regulations?

- The FSSAI wants to shield the children from consuming unhealthy food items and snacks.
- So, it prohibits food companies that manufacture the above-mentioned items from advertising or offering for free such foods in school premises and within 50 m of the campus.
- It wants to thwart food companies from luring children to consume foods rich in fat, sugar and salt.
- So, it prohibited the companies from using their logos, brand names and product names on educational materials, as well as on school property such as buildings, buses, and athletic fields.
- As a guidance to provide wholesome food, the agency recommends the use of a combination of whole grains, milk, eggs, and millets.
- It also listed a set of general guidelines for selection of food products that can be offered in schools.

What is the significance of this move?

- Even as malnutrition accounted for over seven lakhs (68%) deaths in children under the age of five years in 2017 in India, there is rising obesity in schoolchildren in many States.

- **July 2017 study** - India, with 14.4 million, had the second most number of obese children among 195 countries.
- **Recent study** - 23 States to have child overweight prevalence more than the national average, with 6 States having a prevalence of over 20%.
- Studies have shown how a western diet affects the composition and diversity of gut bacteria and sets the stage for many metabolic diseases.
- Hence, any attempt to reduce and discourage the intake of unhealthy foods should be welcomed.
- (Intake of unhealthy foods - A major cause of unhealthy weight gain in children).

What would be the challenge?

- The challenge will be in **enforcement**, particularly in preventing the sale and promotion of unhealthy food near schools.
- For instance, despite the sale and advertisement of tobacco products within 100 yards of a school being prohibited, violation is more the norm than the exception.
- Shops that sell tobacco products very often also sell many of the packaged unhealthy foods that the FSSAI now wants to ban.
- **Way Forward** - The onus of inculcating healthy eating habits also starts at home.
- Besides taking steps to reduce the intake of unhealthy food, both schools and parents should ensure children get adequate physical activity, which is increasingly being neglected for various reasons.
- It is a combination of healthy food and regular physical activity that will go a long way in bringing up healthier children.

Source: The Hindu

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