

# Food Safety Law and Education

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## Abstract

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*Safe and nutritious food is necessary for a healthy life and to pursue education. However, it is a malady that today's environment is attuned to unhealthy and unsafe food. In addition to this, pollution caused by unsustainable development and other allied factors has maligned this. As a result, people are afflicted with sickness and ailments. The students, both at school and college level are at a greater risk of losing health. They are prone to glamorous commercials which fascinate them to eat junk and unhealthy food. This necessitates us to think over the issue of food safety measures and the related food safety act if we are really the well-wishers of school and college students. If the students of any grade ail on account of unsafe food, they will not be able to pursue their studies as consistently and pleurably as they will do if they are healthy. It is, therefore, imperative to assimilate food safety measures with the educational system including curriculum. This paper focuses on Food Safety Laws in India and various initiatives taken by the governments, at national, state and local levels to annex food safety and nutrition to education. Apathetic attitude and lethargy on the part of administrative agencies towards the implementation of laws are to be weeded out so that the physical and mental health of pursuers of education may bloom to the optimum level.*

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### **NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SAFETY**

Education at present is afflicted with sick children who are easily vulnerable to unhealthy and unsafe food. The spread of intensified

pollution caused by unsustainable development has added fuel to the fire. Today, the students are misguided by printed and electronic glamorous advertisements which allure them to eat junk and unhealthy food. Even

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some negligent and reckless parents have gone a long way to contribute to it. Access to sufficient quantity of safe and nutritious food is, no doubt, the key to sustain a healthy life. But it is a matter of grievous pity that there is a serious lack in this access. It is a matter of common knowledge that if the students of any grade are sick or ill on account of unsafe food, they will not be able to pursue their studies as industriously as they will do if they are healthy. It is, therefore, necessary to take into stock the food safety measures before education is given a serious thought.

### **RESULTS EMANATING FROM UNSAFE FOOD**

Unsafe food comprises of dangerous bacteria, viruses, parasites and chemical elements. These result in diseases from diarrhea to cancer. About 600 million people, i.e., 1 out of 10 in the world fall ill after having contaminated food and 4, 20,000 die every year. Diarrhoeal diseases result in the illness of 550 million people and 2,30,000 deaths every year. Every year, approximately 1,25,000 children under 5 years of age die due to food-borne diseases (World Health Organisation Factsheets on Food Safety, 2020). The major cause of mortality and morbidity among school going children is the prevalence of under nutrition among children. The available data is important for evolving a curriculum and syllabus that addresses the real life situation. The curriculum design has to address and integrate these concerns effectively.

Food safety, nutrition and education are inextricably linked. They are important for the overall development of the child and these three inputs need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Unsafe food creates a vicious cycle of diseases. Malnutrition affects not only elderly and sick but also the infants and young school children. Other than the impacts on health, unsafe food impacts other things also. There are negative economic consequences not only for individuals and families but also for communities, business and countries. They impose substantial burden on health care systems and reduce economic productivity and threaten livelihood. Food-borne diseases impede socio-economic development by straining health care systems and harming national economics, tourism and trade.

The Supreme Court, in Pt. Parmanand Kataravs Union of India, held that Right to health is a fundamental right under Article 21 because health is vital for making life meaningful, purposeful and attuned with personal dignity. The State is under an obligation to protect every person's right to life. It is the responsibility of those who are in-charge of the health of the community to protect life (1989 AIR 2039).

Similarly, in Centre for Public Interest Litigation vs Union of India, the Supreme Court observed that the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India also includes the right to have food articles and beverages which are free from

injurious residues like pesticides or insecticides; food articles which are injurious to public health can strike the fundamental right to life guaranteed by the Constitution and it is government's duty to take steps for the protection of life and health (2014 AIR 49).

### **MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

Realising the gravity and enormity of the situation, certain measures have been taken by the Governments. One of them is the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. It provides for unsafe food and its regulatory mechanism. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has undertaken to make people aware at large about the unsafe food, their ill-effects, steps and techniques to detect the presence of adulterants in food, safe and nutritious food, how to take them, etc. This is indeed a major step in the right direction of a better future.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has issued a handbook named *The Pink Book: Your Guide for Safe and Nutritious Food at Home*, wherein all do's and don'ts are prescribed for food such as, how to select and purchase food, storing raw food, preparing and cooking food, serving food, eating healthy food, storing cooked food, packing food, maintaining hygiene and sanitation, etc.

Similarly, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has also issued a handbook named DART:

Detect Adulteration with Rapid Test, which tells about common quick tests to detect adulteration in some household items.

Taking into account the fact that children are change agents of the future, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has developed a 'Do-it-yourself' toolkit for school children—a 'Food Safety Magic Box' for detecting food adulterants through easy tests at school. Recently, a new handbook named *Eat Right* has been launched which broadly contains the following themes or principles:

1. Eat Healthy
2. Eat Safe
3. Eat Fortified
4. No Food Waste
5. Physical Exercise.

Basically it's a guide on what to eat, how to eat, when to eat and how much to eat.

The National Education Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has mentioned about the importance of health and nutrition among school children. According to it, the guarantee of health, nutrition and inclusive school environment, whereby children are empowered in learning, has been enjoined upon. The child's accomplishment at school is determined by nutrition and physical activities, henceforth resources must be deployed and Mid-day Meal programme should be fortified. Special efforts are to be made to make sure that both boys and girls receive same attention in

health and physical education right from the pre-school stage. Well growth of children is a condition precedent for all the development. For this, the basic needs like sufficient nutrition, physical workout and other needs are to be taken care of. Access to food, safe drinking water, housing, sanitation and health services influences the health status. There is an immediate need to breed awareness about health and cultivate habits essential for a healthy living. It was proposed that inclusive, organised and systematic approaches to health education awareness be incorporated in teacher education curricula (NCF, 2005).

The introduction of Mid-day Meal Scheme in school is a commendable and wise step in the direction of providing nutritious and healthy food to students who lack access to nutritious food. The Mid-day Meal Scheme provides cooked nutritious food to the school children. During 2017–18, 9.46 crore school children studying in 11.34 lakh schools reaped the benefit of hot cooked nutritious food (Annual Report, MHA, 2017–18). While cooking food for school children, the nutrition guidelines for the minimum amount of food and calorie content per child per day are expected to be borne in mind. It is a matter of common knowledge that 450 calorie for students of primary classes (i.e. Class I to Class V) and 750 calories for students of upper primary classes (i.e. Class V to VIII) are the minimum requirements of a child per day.

However, there are administrative lapses too while receiving and

distributing mid-day meal among the students. On certain occasions, cockroaches, lizards and other unwanted external elements have been found in the food. It is an indication that the place where food is cooked is unhygienic and those who are the in-charge of preparing mid-day meal can be charged with the dereliction of duty. So it is necessary to keep a watchful eye to curb such negligence. As a matter of fact, Mid-day Meal Scheme should be extended to the students who are pursuing higher education at university level. It is an undeniable fact that this is a noble step initiated in the sector of education.

In addition to this, introducing operational guidelines on school health programme under Ayushman Bharat is another initiative for improving the health of children receiving education. Its objectives are to identify malnourished and anaemic children to detect and treat diseases early in childhood and adolescence, and to provide appropriate information about health and nutrition to the school children (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018).

To realise these objectives, teachers from science and physical education background and self-motivated teachers with good communication skills and ability are to be given preference so that they may act as Health and Wellness Ambassadors for students. They will be able to improve nutrition, mental health, prevent injuries and violence and address the condition for

non-communicable diseases. All these measures will have the way for food safety.

Education of children at school level is an important concern which aims at holistic development of children by promoting among them the ability to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner. Teachers play a crucial role in achieving these goals. Towards this end, the pre-service teacher education programme lays an emphasis on orienting teachers as well as developing skills among them. The core of Human Resource Development is 'education', which plays a significant and supportive role in balancing the socio-economic fabric of the country. A recent initiative of MHRD of providing training to teachers under NISHTHA, has been given importance under the theme 'Health and Well Being'. NISHTHA is a National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement, wherein National Resource Groups will train the Key Resource Persons and State Resource Persons.

Healthy eating habits and maintaining hygiene, which are important factors affecting the health of children are also essential. The body remains fit only when various organ systems function properly. The organ systems remain fit and healthy only when nutritious diet is taken regularly, hygienic habits and regular physical exercises are performed and healthy lifestyle is observed. A healthy and fit body helps in developing a

positive attitude towards oneself and others. Just as a single swallow doesn't make a summer, in the same way, healthy eating habits are not sufficient unless they are backed by safe and uncontaminated food.

### **CONCLUSION**

Besides above steps, there is every need to make the majority of Indian population aware about the unsafe food, their ill-effects, steps and techniques to detect adulterants in food and the availability of safe and nutritious food. Like the mid-day meal programmes practiced by public and municipal schools in several states, the Union and State governments should make it mandatory to include nutraceutical products as a part of diet in these schools such as, vitamins and minerals. Also, supplements, fortified foods and beverages, functional foods, healthy drinks, etc., could be included in the meals provided by these programmes.

A mass campaign is required to be launched for the food safety law. Without the awareness among people and their active participation, it will be difficult to make the food safety standards in India at par with international standards. Voluntary compliance will provide a stronger basis for public health measures than legal compulsion.

This can be done by making Food Safety Law a part of the school and university curriculum like social science in school and social-economic offences in law course, specifying

about how to detect adulterants in food, the availability of safe and nutritious food, how to select safe food, eating healthy food, maintaining hygiene and sanitation, etc. Regular demonstration and workshops in schools and colleges should be conducted to create awareness among students at large. Besides these, social media, awareness clips in cinema, TV shows, sign boards in public transport and metro should be employed to create awareness. A ban should be clamped on junk and

low quality food in school, colleges, universities, etc.

In this respect, I would like to quote words from the Preface written by Shri Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI. According to him, if there is a time to take charge of our food choice and habits, it is now. India faces a silent epidemic today; of rising childhood obesity coupled with under nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Each one of us, parents, teachers and children, has a right and responsibility to make an informed choice (Pawan Agarwal, 2019).

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