

Fresh govt thrust to junk junk food in school canteens across India

PRO-HEALTH The proposal is the result of a spike in obesity among schoolchildren

Moushumi Das Gupta

■ moushumi.gupta@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Piping hot pizzas, burgers, french fries and ice creams might soon give way to healthy salads and fresh fruit juices in school canteens across India.

Worried over the spike in the incidence of obesity and other health issues reported among school children on account of regularly consuming junk food, the Women and Child Development (WCD) ministry is mulling to bring a policy to ban such foods served in school canteens across the country.

India currently does not have any regulation banning junk food

JUNK FOOD IS CONSIDERED UNHEALTHY AS IT IS LOW IN FIBRE, HIGH IN FAT AND SUGAR IN LIQUID FORM. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL STUDIES, JUNK FOOD ALSO INDUCES GORGING THAT LEADS TO OBESITY, DIABETES AND HEART PROBLEMS.

CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

in school canteens, though a committee set up by the Centre had in March 2014 recommended restricting the availability of such items inside schools and up to 50 metres of their boundaries.

In a recent meeting after she assumed charge, WCD minister Maneka Gandhi directed offi-

cial to come up with a proposal to replace junk food with nutritious food in schools.

"The proposed policy will not only specify what constitutes junk food but will also spell out in detail the impact of daily intake of such foods in children," said a ministry official. To start with,

WCD ministry officials are in the process of studying the regulatory framework under which such a policy can be framed and implemented on a pan-India level.

"We will also consult different stakeholders including the HRD and the health and food ministries before coming up with the policy. A final call would only be taken after getting them on board," the official added. The ministry is also keen to put the issue of framing this policy in its 100-day agenda.

In 2010, an NGO, Uday Foundation, had filed a PIL in Delhi high court to ban junk food and aerated drinks in schools. The HC is yet to give a final verdict.