

Govt set to ban potassium bromate as food additive ; CSE report on bread



The government is set to ban potassium bromate as food additive with Health Minister J P Nadda asserting that it will take appropriate action following a report which claimed presence of cancer-causing chemicals in bread samples of virtually all top brands.

A Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) study had found nearly 84 per cent of 38 commonly available brands of pre-packaged breads including pav and buns, testing positive for potassium bromate and potassium iodate, banned in many countries as they are listed as "hazardous" for public health.

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It claimed that while one of the chemicals is a category 2B carcinogen (possibly carcinogenic to humans), the other could trigger thyroid disorders but India has not banned their use.

Nadda said he has directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to take the matter seriously and submit a report at the earliest.

"I have told FSSAI to take the matter seriously and submit the report. They are coming out with a report. The Ministry will take appropriate action accordingly. We will take action as soon as the report comes," Nadda told reporters.

"Potassium bromate is one of 11,000 food additives that are allowed in food business. After careful consideration, the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has decided to remove potassium bromate from the list of permissible additives," FSSAI CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal said.

The regulator has recommended removal of potassium bromate from the list of permissible food additives to the Health Ministry.

On the notification, Agarwal said, "As far as issue of notification is concerned the FSSAI has already sent the recommendation to Ministry of Health and it would be issued by the Ministry and there it may take a week or two."

After the removal of potassium bromate from the list, its use as food additive would be banned, he said.

On use of potassium iodate, FSSAI is examining the evidence and soon a decision will be taken over the same.

CSE also welcomed steps initiated by the country's food regulator to ban potassium bromate used as a food additive and said public health must remain a "priority".

According to CSE, potassium bromate typically increases dough strength, leads to higher rising and uniform finish to baked products, while potassium iodate is a flour treatment agent.

"We welcome the steps initiated by FSSAI to ban potassium bromate and evaluate the use of potassium iodate we hope a ban on potassium iodate will follow.

"The Authority's quick response to what we found in our study reestablishes our stand that public health must remain a priority," said Chandra Bhushan, deputy director general, CSE said.
