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Hygiene training changes little for street food vendors of Delhi



India's apex food regulatory authority trained more than 23,000 food vendors how to handle hygienic food for over two months but nothing has changed on the ground.

Food vendors continue their old practices as they wait for the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to give them free "promotional kits" as part of the Clean Street Food – Project Delhi training project.

The kits, containing two aprons, one t-shirt, one cap, 50 disposable plastic gloves and a hand sanitiser, will be a one-time hand-out to promote hygienic practices.

The training was organised between March 13 and May 7.

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“The kits will be given to introduce them to hygienic practices. The gloves will last for five to 10 days, the aprons for a few months, after which the vendors will have to start buying their own supplies,” said Sangeeta Singh, manager of street food programmes’ National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), one of the partner organisations in the project.

The four-hour training session held by the Delhi Food Safety Department was of little help, say vendors. “We were told to wash hands and cut our nails, which we do anyway. The rest of the things were just not feasible. I cannot boil and pour tea with plastic gloves,” said Surinder Shah, a tea stall owner.

Only five of the 12 street vendors visited by the reporter had gone for the training session and only two completed it. None made changes to their processes.

Over 23,000 of the estimated 30,000-35,000 vendors in the city have participated in the project, according to the Delhi Food Safety Department. The project was termed as “successful” and may soon be rolled out in 40 big cities.

Some had already adopted practices that are good for business. Jeevan Kumar, who runs a fruit salad stall in Connaught Place said, “I have been using an apron and gloves because it is a necessity. Our hands and clothes get sticky and dirty cutting fruit. The free caps may be useful, but some other suggestions, such as using closed bin, are not feasible as we have to constantly keep throwing the peels.”

Sanjay Gupta, who sells sweets in the same area, kept his wares covered with muslin cloth and foil but that is because it drives up his sales. “When people see that the sweets are kept in hygienic conditions they come to us. I am planning to get a uniform stitched for us. And, maybe we will start wearing the caps once the kit comes in,” he said.

“We were told that we would receive certificates which will allow us to continue selling food here. That is why I rushed to the Delhi food safety office and submitted my documents. They were giving some talk, but I really did not have the time to listen to it. They said that they would be sending the certificate over to the shop, so, I left,” said Ram Bharose, who sells bread and omelette near Barakhamba Metro station.

Toxic bite

Some diseases caused by contaminated food and water
Hepatitis A and E (jaundice)

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Dysentery
Diarrhoea, cramps
Typhoid
Cholera