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Press Release

FSSAI-Industry initiative to address Food Borne Illnesses Supported By - American Society for Microbiology

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The FSSAI-industry collaboration on promoting science based food safety took yet another step towards tackling the enormous burden of food borne illness in the country. An expert's roundtable on "Reducing Foodborne Illness: Strengthening Surveillance Capabilities and Epidemiological investigations" was organized at FSSAI dated 27th April'2018.

In 2016, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India had signed an MOU with CHIFSS, a partnership initiative on food safety sciences between the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Hindustan Unilever (HUL) to promote science based food safety.

Food borne disease burden is a global concern both in terms of human suffering and economic costs. The Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG) set up by the World Health Organization (WHO), in its 2015 report estimated that the global burden of Food Borne Illness in 2010 was 600 million cases worldwide with 420,000 deaths. The burden in South East Asia alone (including India) is about 150 million cases and 175,000 deaths with India having the highest mortality for children aged below 5 years' age and an estimated economic burden of food borne illnesses. A recent report of the Wageningen University and International Livestock Research Institute estimated that the annual economic costs of foodborne illness were to the tune of US\$ 28 billion

This roundtable was jointly organized by FSSAI and CHIFSS, and supported by the American Society of Microbiology, with the intention of bringing together relevant stakeholders of the country comprising regulatory bodies, government, research institutes, health care professionals, public messaging services and industries on a common platform to address the Food borne illness burden in India, and to develop a roadmap for monitoring and mitigating the disease burden in India.

The meeting was attended by key international and national stakeholders including the Centres for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), USA & India office, and the World Health Organization (WHO). The technical sessions provided an overview of the current scenario for monitoring and burden of food borne illness in India and international experts shared experiences from other countries. This was followed by group discussions across 3 critical pillars: Overall Burden of Foodborne illness; Outbreaks and epidemics; and enabling mechanisms for management and control of foodborne illnesses. Each group identified short, medium and long-term action plans which were shared in the concluding session. The output of group discussion will be sharpened into an implementation plan which will be discussed with Key stakeholders.

Shri Pawan Aggarwal, CEO, FSSAI, said that India is moving towards the direction of making a well-developed food network, but still a lot of work is to be done. He highlighted the presentations from WHO on IHIP and the US experience including the case studies gave us very good pointers of what can be achieved through a robust surveillance system like identifying the pathogen, the root cause and issue food recalls. In order to undertake more effective surveillance and investigation of foodborne illness in India, he emphasised the importance of connecting the new IT based FSSAI system, the IHIP system and the food testing lab network in a seamless manner. In this way we can complete the entire loop of prevention by identifying the cause of the illness right up to the level of the food businesses and undertaking corrective actions and food recalls. He also stressed the importance of such a meeting and highlighted the responsibilities shared by each of the stakeholder in achieving the overall agenda of reducing the food borne illness burden of the country.