New Delhi: Food safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) chief executive officer Pawan Kumar Agarwal on Tuesday said the food regulator will first “define junk food” before looking at imposing any additional tax on packaged foods with high fat, sugar and salt content.

Last week, FSSAI had put up a report by an 11-member expert group on the subject. FSSAI had set up the expert group after a Delhi high court order in June 2015. The expert group, which listed almost every packaged food item in the category, had proposed an additional tax on all packaged food items with high fat, sugar and salt.

“Imposing additional tax on the purchase of commodities such as pre-packaged foods with high salt and fat content, sugar sweetened beverages, etc. can be a pragmatic approach to reduce the rising burden of chronic diseases among Indian population. Imposing excise tax on unhealthy eating products can be an endeavour to bring about positive health effects among population. This exercise can be of great importance in supporting nutrition-related programmes by the means of profit generated from taxing unhealthy food products,” noted the expert group report.

“The report will be used as a reference. We may or may not take the suggestions listed there,” Agarwal said, adding that the regulator is likely to bring new labelling norms based on the suggestions in the report. The regulator is in the process of finalizing the new labelling norms.

The expert group also asked for restrictions of advertisement of these products on kids television channels and during programmes targeted to children. “This has to be looked into in detail,” Agarwal said.
Meanwhile, Agarwal said FSSAI is collaborating with corporate entities, academic institutions and Government skilling councils for Food Safety Training and Certification programme to train food safety supervisors. “Over a period, every food company will mandatorily have to have at least one trained food safety supervisor at its premises,” said Agarwal.

The authority has developed 19 short-term courses that would be offered at different institutes. “We’ll eventually host e-learning courses that will be available to all and raise the food standards of food businesses by several notches,” added Agarwal.

On Tuesday, the food regulator also launched a new interactive portal meant for the consumers for information, references and grievance redressal.

As part of its aim to enhance food safety and nutrition, FSSAI is planning to come up with joint campaigns with the Swachch Bharat Abhiyan, the regulator said in a statement.