Food borne diseases cost India $28 billion a year: World Bank study

To reduce the economic burden, India needs to invest in ensuring food safety for the masses, says a study by World Bank and the Netherlands government.

The two-day round-table meeting, which was organized by the country’s food regulator FSSAI, was chaired by union health and family welfare minister Jagat Prakash Nadda. File photo: HT

New Delhi: Food borne diseases cost India about $28 billion (Rs1,78,100 crore) or around 0.5% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) every year, revealed a study by ‘Food for All’ partnership of the World Bank Group and The Netherlands government.
To reduce the economic burden, India needs to invest in ensuring food safety for the masses. Indians are moving from simple staples to more nutritious food. While this should have positive impacts, according to the study, the transformation is currently leading to “risky foods”. “If no investments in food safety are made, there could be an adverse impact with potentially large costs due to increase in poverty and under-nutrition,” said Delia Grace, program manager (animal and human health, ILRI, in her presentation on Tuesday at a round-table meeting of health ministers from the states.

The study was conducted by Grace, Zuzana Smeets Kristkova, researcher at Wageningen Economic Research, and Marijke Kuiper, senior research economist at Wageningen Economic Research, Wageningen University, Netherlands.

The two-day round-table meeting, which was organized by the country’s food regulator Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), was chaired by union health and family welfare minister Jagat Prakash Nadda.

Ensuring safe food, said Grace, will eventually reduce child mortality. According to her, India should improve its food safety policy through coordination across the value chain, develop key infrastructure, such as cold chains, storage facilities, better testing capacity, crop protection, and animal health to improve food safety.

According to the ILRI expert, India needs to strengthen training and education across all levels of the value chain, ensure “faster collaboration” between governments, producers and consumers and embed food safety in nutrition programs (government schemes).

The health ministers from different states on Tuesday adopted a joint resolution with seven-point charter.

“Recognizing that safe, hygienic and healthy diet is key to preventive healthcare which is part of the first pillar of National Health Policy, 2017, the state health ministers agreed to improved convergence between National Health Mission and Safe and Nutritious Food campaigns initiated by FSSAI,” FSSAI said in a statement.

This would include using funds from the National Health Policy for strengthening of food safety systems in the states, integration of emergency response system under National Food Mission, added the FSSAI statement.
As part of the charter, the state health ministers agreed to support development of robust food standards and codes of practice for safe food, create a positive regulatory environment, establish a credible and robust national food testing system and address micronutrient deficiencies through government schemes and by promoting healthy dietary habits.

The state health ministers also agreed to build “culture of self-compliance amongst food businesses”. The ministers have also assured to focus on third-party audits, make enforcement transparent, standardized, predictable and fair by adopting digital compliance platform.