

Restaurants Rush to Serve Cure for Bird Flu Panic

Issue advisories, send out messages on safety of their products to help prevent business from taking more hits

**Ratna Bhushan &
Anumeha Chaturvedi**

New Delhi: With the bird flu scare spreading across the country, restaurants have swung into damage-control mode to reassure consumers about consuming chicken dishes, one of the largest-selling cuisines in the country among non-vegetarians.

Yum! Brands-owned KFC, Asian cuisine chain Kylin and Lite Bite Foods-owned Punjab Grill said sales have been hit since the outbreak.

"We have seen a drop in the sales momentum over the past few days," a KFC spokesperson said. "It is difficult to attribute this impact to any particular development. Several factors as the ongoing protests and harsh winters in the north, among others, are in play at present."

The spokesperson said the chicken

served at KFC India is cooked at 170 degrees Celsius, which is much higher than the temperature of 70°C for cooking of poultry prescribed by the World Health Organization.

Kylin managing director Saurabh Khanijo said consumers are staying away from chicken dishes.

"They're looking for more fish options, especially with fish being in season. Sales of chicken items have dropped by 10-15%," he said.

The bird flu outbreak comes as restaurants had started to report a revival in dining-out after the Covid-10-induced slump since March-end. The dine-in business, which drives the bulk of revenue for restaurants, had begun turning around towards the end of the previous quarter, with fewer Covid-19 cases and the lifting of restrictions, though about a third of the restaurants and bars across the country may have shut permanently because of the pandemic.



FILE PHOTO

Rohit Aggarwal, director at Lite Bite Foods, said: "There has been a drop in chicken sales in our restaurants in markets like Chennai and Kerala. However, we are reassuring consumers about the safety of chicken across our restaurants."

Food search and delivery platform Zomato, and meat delivery companies such as Licious and FreshToHome, meanwhile, sent out

detailed mailers over the weekend to consumers on the safety of chicken products, cooking temperatures and adherence to additional safety protocols.

FreshToHome sent out a message that said its chicken is raised in bio-secured farms under the supervision of veterinarians.

Speciality Foods-owned Mainland China and Zorawar Kalra's Farzi

Cafe and Made in Punjab said while there was no impact yet on chicken sales, they are issuing advisories to consumers on the safety of the products.

Anjan Chatterjee, chairman of Speciality Restaurants that operates Mainland China and Oh! Calcutta, said: "We have reviewed the developments and the needle on sales has not moved down. But following reports of cases and considering we are still going through the coronavirus, we are issuing advisories on the same."

The bird flu scare has impacted the sale of chicken and chicken products, especially in north India, with the ban on inter-state transportation of hens also impacting sales.

A spokesperson for McDonald's India - North and East said chicken products served in its restaurants undergo 64 quality checks across the supply chain from the farms to its restaurants.