



Leprosy

For Prelims: Leprosy and Related Initiatives , Covid-19 pandemic, World Bank, SPARSH, Mahatma Gandhi

For Mains: Health, Government Policies & Interventions, Leprosy, Covid-19 pandemic

Why in News?

According to the latest report by the [Leprosy Mission Trust India](#), the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) and its ensuing recommendations on **social distancing and lockdowns** caused a fall of **62.5% in the detection of active leprosy cases** between April and September 2020 in four States — **Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh**.

- The [second wave](#) has put brakes on the **Leprosy Case Detection Campaign** and the scope for getting healthcare and disability management services in institutional setup reduced.
- Further, the pandemic highlighted that the **‘vulnerable population’** is not a homogenous entity. Their vulnerability is sometimes a complex intersection of **different social variables: poverty, disability, stigma, exclusion, etc.**

What is Leprosy?

- **Bacterial Infection:** Leprosy is a **chronic, progressive bacterial infection**. It is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium Leprae*, which is an acid-fast rod-shaped bacillus.
 - It is also known as **Hansen’s Disease**.
- **One of Oldest Disease:** It is **one of the oldest diseases** in recorded history, afflicting humanity since time immemorial.
 - A written account of Leprosy dates as far back as **600 B.C.**
 - It was **well recognized in the oldest civilizations of China, Egypt and India** thousands of years ago.
- **Areas of Infection:** Skin, Peripheral nerves, Upper respiratory tract and Lining of the nose.
 - It is a disease that **leaves a terrifying image in its wake of mutilation, rejection, and exclusion** from society.
- **Mode of Transmission:** Mainly by breathing airborne droplets from the affected individuals. It can be contacted at any age.
- **Symptoms:**
 - Red patches on the skin.
 - Skin Lesion
 - Numbness in arms, hands, and legs.
 - Ulcers on the soles of feet.
 - Muscle Weakness and excessive weight loss.
- **Long Incubation Period:** It usually takes about **3-5 years for symptoms to appear after coming into contact with Leprosy causing bacteria**. The long incubation period makes it difficult for doctors to determine when and where the person got infected.
- **Cure:** Leprosy is curable with the **combination of drugs known as Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT)**.

What are Steps Taken by India for its Eradication?

- The Government of India started the National **Leprosy Control Programme in 1955**. It was only in the 1970s that a definite cure was identified in the form of **MultiDrug Therapy**.
- The 1st Phase of the **World Bank supported National Leprosy Elimination Project** started from 1993-94.
- The **National Leprosy Eradication Programme** is being continued with Government of India funds from January 2005 onwards.
- The **National Health Policy 2002**, Government of India had set the goal of elimination of leprosy i.e. to reduce the no. of cases to < 1/10,000 population by the year 2005.
- The **National Leprosy Eradication Programme achieved the goal of elimination of leprosy** as a public health problem, defined as less than 1 case per 10,000 Population, at the National Level in the month of December, 2005.
 - **World Health Organisation Global Leprosy strategy document for 2016-2020** calls for promoting inter-sectoral collaboration within countries.
- In 2017, **SPARSH Leprosy Awareness Campaign** was launched to promote awareness and address the issues of stigma and discrimination.
 - The measures included in the campaign like **contact tracing, examination, treatment, and chemoprophylaxis** are expected to bring down the number of Leprosy cases.
 - The special emphasis on **women, children and those with disabilities** are expected to flush out more hidden cases.
 - In addition to continuing to administer MDT to patients, **new preventive approaches such as Chemoprophylaxis and immunoprophylaxis** are being considered to break the chain of transmission and reach zero disease status.
- In **2018 the Supreme Court directed states and the Central government** to roll out awareness programmes about leprosy.
 - The court said campaigns should utilise positive images and stories of those who had been cured.
- In 2019, Lok Sabha passed a bill seeking to **remove Leprosy as a ground for divorce**.
- In commemoration of the **150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October 2019**, the NLEP has prepared the comprehensive plan to reduce the grade of disability to less than one case per million people by October 2019.

Source: TH

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