



Rapid Fire Current Affairs

Covid-19 Variant Surveillance and WHO's IPSN System

The **India SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG)**, responsible for monitoring and sequencing **Covid-19 variants in India**, has not released a weekly bulletin since March 27, 2023. This **decline in genomic surveillance** has raised concerns regarding the **country's ability to track and respond to new and potentially threatening variants**.

The Department of Biotechnology explained that no specific variants of significant concern have been detected; however, the **WHO warning against diverting attention from Covid-19** recently launched the **International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN)** to strengthen global efforts in pathogen genomics .

The IPSN is a global network of pathogen genomic actors, hosted by the WHO Hub for **Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence**, to accelerate progress on the deployment of pathogen genomics and improve public health decision-making. By strengthening the pathogen genomic surveillance ecosystem, the **IPSN enables faster detection of new pathogens and the enhanced tracking of the spread and evolution of diseases**. This in turn can drive better public health responses. The IPSN supports ongoing disease surveillance and will help detect and fully characterize new disease threats before they become epidemics or pandemics.

Read more: [COVID-19](#), [COVID-19 AND INDIA](#)

Deaths Linked to Extreme Weather

According to the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**, nearly 150,000 Indians have lost their lives over the past 51 years due to **extreme weather** events.

The analysis by WMO revealed that **between 1970 and 2021**, India experienced **573 climate-related disasters**, resulting in the **2nd-highest number of deaths in Asia, after Bangladesh**. These fatalities (138,377) highlight the vulnerability of communities to **weather-related hazards**. This information is a part of the updated data released by WMO, emphasizing the **urgent need for effective early warning systems and disaster management** to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events.

Extreme weather events are phenomena that involve **unexpected, unusual, severe, or unseasonal weather conditions** that deviate from the historical distribution of a given location. They can have significant **impacts on human lives, ecosystems, and economies, especially in a changing climate**. Some examples of extreme weather events are **heat waves, cold waves, tropical cyclones, droughts, floods, and wildfires**.

According to the **IPCC**, many extreme weather events have become **more frequent and intense since 1950** due to human-induced **greenhouse gas emissions** that **increase global temperatures**.

Read more: [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#), [Events of Extreme Weather](#)

Funding the Future: WHO's Financial Budget

The WHO recently agreed upon a budget of **USD 6.83 billion for the next two years at the 76th World Health Assembly (WHA)**, representing a historic **20% increase in assessed contributions**.

Assessed contributions, which are membership fees paid by countries based on their wealth and population, **have seen a decline in their share of financing the WHO over the years**. This decline has been **compensated by voluntary contributions**, which now account for more than **three-quarters of the organisation's funding**. The reliance on voluntary contributions raises **questions about the governance and sustainability of the organisation**.

The **top contributors to the WHO in 2020-2021** were **Germany, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the US, the UK, and the European Commission**. However, there have been concerns about the influence of earmarked contributions and their potential impact on the WHO's flexibility.

WHO has stated that the **current uneven distribution of funds hinders its ability to effectively support countries** and achieve its **Triple Billion targets related to universal health coverage and healthier populations** in areas that have historically received less financial support from specific contributions.

Read More: [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

India Implements Stricter Regulations for Exported Cough Syrups

In response to **recent incidents of contamination in India-made cough syrups**, India has implemented **stricter regulations for the export of cough syrups**. Starting from June 1, 2023 **cough syrups can only be exported after undergoing testing and certification by a government laboratory**, as stated in a notification by the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade**.

The directive requires a certificate of analysis from approved laboratories, including central **drug testing laboratories, regional testing laboratories, or those accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories**. Previously, there were no checks on products being exported.

Notably, all batches of medicines sold within India already undergo testing by authorised laboratories. The **contamination incidents were initially brought to attention by the WHO**, which identified contaminated **Indian-manufactured syrups linked to deaths in Gambia, Uzbekistan, Micronesia, and Marshall Islands**.

The contaminants **diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol**, found in the samples tested by other countries, are likely originating from **contaminated solvents used during manufacturing**. While the solvents themselves are not harmful, the presence of these toxic contaminants can cause various health issues, including **acute kidney injury**.

Read More: [Contamination in India-made cough syrups](#)