



India Nears Kala Azar Elimination

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Why in News?

India stands on the brink of **eliminating visceral leishmaniasis**, commonly known as **kala azar**. With a marked decline in reported cases and deaths, the nation has come close to meeting the **elimination target set by the World Health Organization (WHO)**.

- Bangladesh, India's neighbour, was the **first country validated by the WHO for eliminating kala azar as a public health problem**.

What is Kala-Azar?

- **About:**
 - **Visceral leishmaniasis commonly known as kala-azar**, is a **slow-progressing indigenous disease** caused by a protozoan parasite of genus *Leishmania*.
 - It is also known as **Black Fever or Dumdum Fever**.
 - In India ***Leishmania donovani*** is the only parasite causing this disease.
- **Transmission and Symptoms:**
 - It is transmitted by sandflies. Sandflies of the **genus *Phlebotomus argentipes*** are the only known vectors of kala-azar in India.
 - It causes **fever, weight loss, and spleen and liver enlargement**. If left untreated, it can be fatal in 95% of cases.
- **Recorded Cases in India:**
 - India documented **530 cases and four deaths in 2023**, a decline from previous years.
 - Additionally, there were 286 cases of **post-kala azar dermal leishmaniasis (PKDL)**.
- **Post Kala-azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL):**
 - This condition arises when *Leishmania donovani* infiltrates and thrives within skin cells, resulting in the formation of skin lesions.
 - In some instances of kala-azar, **PKDL emerges after treatment**, but now it is believed that PKDL might occur without going through the visceral stage. However, more data is needed to understand how PKDL develops.
 - The visceral stage refers to the initial phase of visceral leishmaniasis (kala-azar), where the **parasite affects internal organs**.
- **Treatment:**
 - In India, the primary treatment for kala-azar involves administering **injectable liposomal amphotericin B**.
 - For PKDL, the standard treatment consists of **12 weeks of oral miltefosine**, with the dosage adjusted based on the patient's age and weight.
- **Strategies for Elimination in India:**
 - **Effective Spraying:** Rigorous monitoring of **indoor residual spraying** to curb sandfly breeding and disease spread.
 - **Wall Plastering:** Using **Gerrard soil for wall plastering** to minimize sandfly breeding areas.
 - **Treatment Compliance:** Ensuring completion of PKDL treatment through the **ASHA**

(Accredited Social Health Activist) network.

Note

WHO has set a target of **2030 to eliminate Kala-azar**. The **WHO's Neglected Tropical Diseases Road map** also includes this target.

- Government of India launched a centrally sponsored **Kala-azar control Programme in 1990-91**. **The National Health Policy (2002)** envisaged kala-azar Elimination by 2010 which was revised later to 2015. Now **Kala-azar is targeted for elimination by 2023 in India**.

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