

# E- pharmacy in India

### Why in News?

In February 2023, the <u>Ministry of Health</u> issued show cause notices to at least 20 companies, including Tata-1mg, Flipkart, Apollo, PharmEasy, Amazon, and Reliance Netmeds for selling medicines online.

## What is the Current Status of E-pharmacy in India?

#### About:

- The growth of <u>e-pharmacy in India</u> has been significant in recent years and is expected to grow at a robust growth rate of 21.28% compound annual growth rate during 2021-2027.
- The main factors driving this growth include increasing internet and smartphone penetration, rising healthcare costs, and a growing demand for convenience and accessibility.

#### ■ E-Pharmacies' Growth:

- The acute need for doorstep delivery of drugs was felt during Covid-19. Nearly 8.8 million households used home delivery services during the lockdown.
  - E-pharmacies call themselves facilitators of doorstep delivery and claim tieups with retail chemists for vending medicines.

### Concerns:

- Impact on Quality of Drugs:
  - The sale, stock, offer for sale or distribution of drugs through online, internet or other electronic platforms without a licence have potential impact on quality of drugs and pose risk to public health.
  - As there arises a cope of misuse of drugs through self-medication and indiscriminate use of the drugs.
- No Statutory Backing:
  - The **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** regulates the import, manufacturing and distribution of drugs in India.
    - However, there is no statutory definition of "e-pharmacy" either under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 or the Pharmacy Act, 1948.
  - However, the electronic sale of physician-prescribed drugs from online drug store sites is expressed **under the IT Act, 2000.**

#### Regulation of E-Pharmacies:

- The Draft e-pharmacy rules were floated by the Ministry of Health in 2018.
  - Multiple court orders, including those from **Bombay, Madras, Delhi, and Patna High Court**, have called for regulating e-pharmacies.
- The **172<sup>nd</sup>** Parliamentary Standing Committee **report** released in June 2022, deemed it "appalling" that e-pharmacy rules had not been notified.

# Mandatory Registration

Presciption required for Schedule H drugs Prohibition on sale of NDPS substances, Schedule X drugs

**Draft E-pharmacy Rules** 

Compliance with Provisions of IT Act and Rules

Prohibition on Advertisement of Drugs

Vision

## Conclusion

■ There is a need to balance the interests of e-pharmacy businesses and offline pharmacists to create a level playing field. In an ecosystem that is moving towards a hybrid mode, all eyes are on the Ministry of Health which will have to effectively regulate the new way of doing e-commerce in the drug space.

**Source: TH** 

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