



E- pharmacy in India

Why in News?

In **February 2023**, the [Ministry of Health](#) 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 [e-pharmacy in India](#) 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 tie-ups with retail chemists for vending medicines.

▪ Concerns:

◦ Impact on Quality of Drugs:

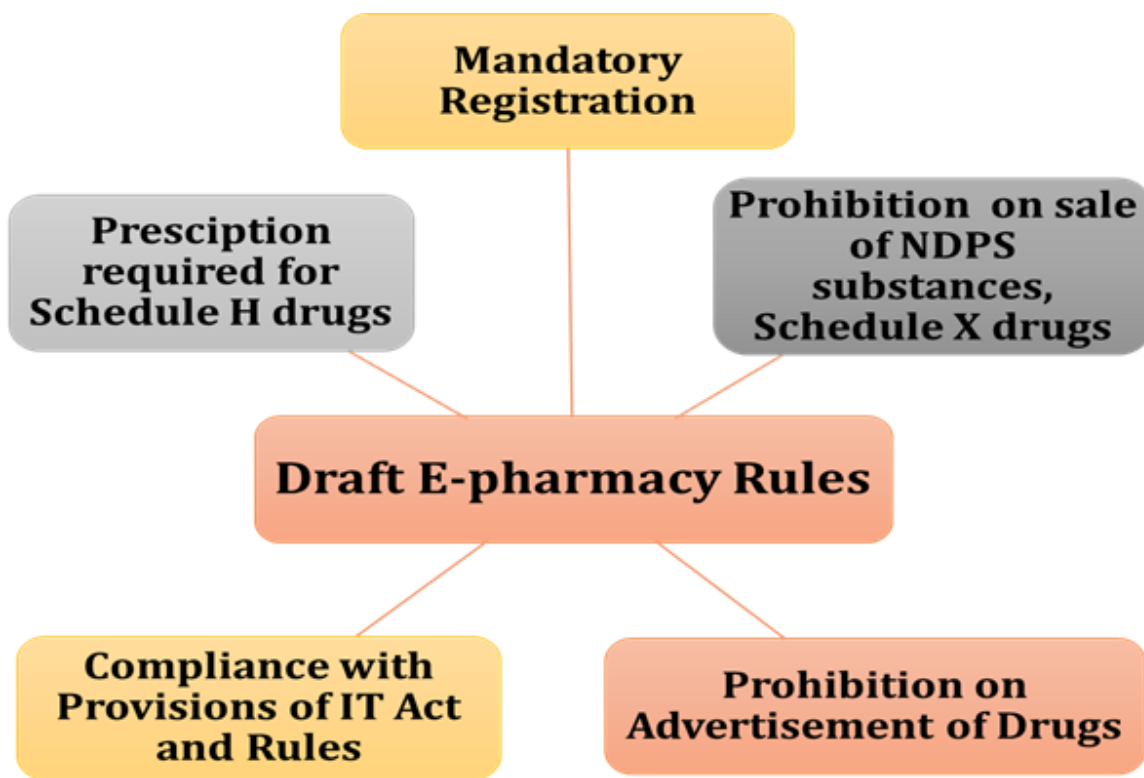
- The **sale, stock, offer for sale or distribution of drugs through online, internet or other electronic platforms without a licence** have potential impact on quality of drugs and pose risk to public health.
- As there arises a cope of **misuse of drugs through self-medication** and indiscriminate 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 **172nd Parliamentary Standing Committee report** released in June 2022, deemed it "appalling" that e-pharmacy rules had not been notified.



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](#)