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MARCH 2023

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

YOJNA IAS WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

CONTENTS

S.No.	Topics	Pg No.
1.	ANTI DEFECTION LAW	1 - 3
2.	JAN AUSHADHI TRAIN	3 - 7
3.	COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION IN INDIA	8 - 10
4.	DIGITAL INDIA BILL	11 - 13
5.	H3N2	14 - 17

CURRENT AFFAIRS
MARCH 2023

ANTI DEFECTION LAW

Relevance for Prelims: Tenth Schedule, Anti-defection law
Relevance for Mains: Horse trading, ethics in public administration, electoral democracy.

WHY IS IT IN THE NEWS?

Justice P S Narasimha, who was a member of the five-judge panel hearing the petitions related to the political unrest that erupted in Maharashtra last year, stated that Parliamentarians had determined that the Speaker "shall be the Tribunal per the 10th Schedule (anti-defection law)" and the court is only interpreting it.

WHAT IS ANTI DEFECTION LAW

- "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram" was a phrase that became popular in Indian politics after a Haryana MLA Gaya Lal changed his party thrice on the same day in 1967. The anti-defection statute aimed to stop such political defections that may be brought on by office rewards or other similar factors.
- In 1985, the Tenth Schedule was added to the Constitution. It outlines the procedure by which parliamentarians may be excluded from serving on a legislative body based on defection based on a petition by any other member of the House. A lawmaker is considered to have defected if he either willingly leaves his party or defies the leadership's instructions during a vote. This suggests that a lawmaker who defies (abstaining from voting or voting against) the party whip on any matter risked losing his seat in the House. Both the Parliament and state legislatures are subject to the statute.

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TENTH SCHEDULE

- Both Elected and Nominated members of Parliament would be disqualified on the ground of defection if
- She/he voluntarily relinquishes his membership of such political party or

- votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction of such party or is expelled from such a party.
- If an elected member of a House joins a political party after being chosen as such rather than as a candidate put out by a political party, he will no longer be eligible to serve in that body.
- A nominated member of a House is unable to serve if, after the lapse of six months from the day on which he assumes his seat after satisfying the conditions of Article 99 or, if applicable, Article 188, he joins any political
- Disqualification due to defection will not apply in the event of a merger. A member of a House may only join a new political party if at least two-thirds of the members of the original party have consented to the
- The Presiding Officer of the House shall decide on the issue of disqualification under the Tenth Schedule. A member of the House chosen by the House to act in that capacity will, however, determine if the issue involves the presiding officer himself.
- The decision of the Presiding Officer on disqualification due to defection shall be subject to Judicial Review.

EFFECTS OF DEFECTION POLITICS

- Governmental instability and administrational issues result from the
- Defection also encourages the exchange of lawmakers for favors, which is plainly against the spirit of a democratic system.
- Legislators who are elected on the platform of one party but later decide it would be more convenient to switch to another party because of the allure of cabinet slots or financial rewards are said to be defying their constituents' will through defection.
- In instances of anti-defection, the Speaker delays the procedure in a biased manner.
- Party whips limit people's ability to vote and exercise their right to political freedom.

CHALLENGES WITH ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

- Since the Anti-defection law was passed, the MP or MLA is forced to vote by the party's platform and is not allowed to do otherwise. The Anti-Defection statute has broken the chain of responsibility by holding MPs solely responsible for their politics.
- The legal definition of the period for the Speaker or House Chairperson to act in anti-defection matters is unclear. Cases might take anything from six months to three certain situations are resolved after the term is done.
- Instead of a democracy of discourse and discussion, the Anti-Defection Legislation has turned India into a democracy of parties and This undermines the strength of the Parliament's debates on any measure since it does not distinguish between dissent and defection.

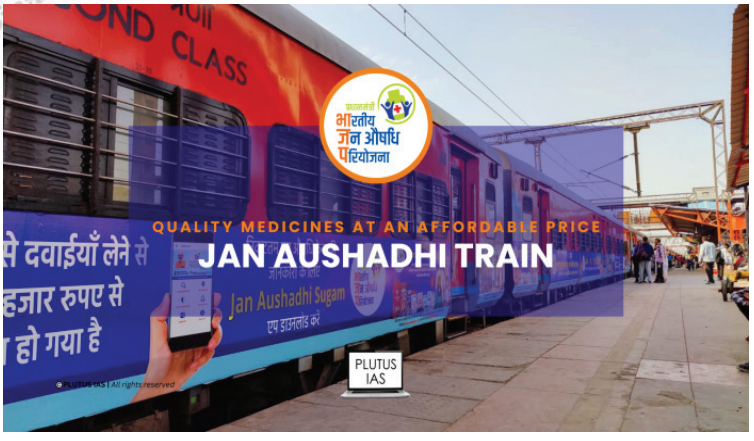
WAY FORWARD

- The Supreme Court has recommended that Parliament create an independent tribunal to handle defection cases quickly and The tribunal would be led by a retired judge from the higher court.
- According to some analysts, the rule should only apply to votes that have an impact on the stability of the A no-confidence motion or the approval of the yearly budget are two examples.
- Election Commission has suggested that the President or Governor should act on the Election Commission's legally binding advice when making decisions under the Tenth Schedule.
- A separate authority should have the ability to address the issue of disqualification. According to Justice Verma in the Hollohan Judgment, the speaker should not hold such power because their term is dependent on their party holding the majority in the House.

Source:
Thehindu

JAN AUSHADHI TRAIN

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details the launch of the Jan Aushadhi train by the Government. The train aims to reach remote locations and provide quality medicines at affordable prices. The high prices of medicine prompted the government to launch Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana which aims to fulfill the above objective.



For Prelims:

Features of the Jan Aushadhi train initiative

Features of Pradhan Mantri – Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana
Target beneficiaries of the scheme
Ministry implementing the scheme

For Mains: GS 2, Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Aims and Objectives behind the launch of the initiative

- **Issues related to the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri –** Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana
- **Solutions for successful implementation of the Pradhan Mantri –** Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana

CONTENTS:

- **Why in the news?**
- **Objectives of the Initiative**
- **What are generic medicines?**
- **What are generic medicines?**
- **What is Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana ?**
- **Performance of the scheme**
- **What are the issues with the Scheme?**
- **What steps can be taken to resolve the issues existing in the scheme?**

Way forward

Why in the news?

Recently, New Delhi: The Union Ministers of Health and Railways together flagged off the Jan Aushadhi train.

Objectives of the Initiatives

The train has been wrapped with the branding of the Jan Aushadhi Scheme and will travel to 4 states. Its primary objective is to spread awareness about the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana which promotes the use of generic medicines, available at more than 9000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras.

What are generic medicines?

Generic medicines are non-branded and non-marketed drugs. They are considered equally effective against a particular illness. The advantage of generic medicines is that they are inexpensive and affordable for use by poor sections. The high prices of drugs often dissuade these sections from taking proper medication. The medicines available under the scheme are priced 50%-90% less than that branded prices.

What is Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana?

- The scheme was launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals with Central Pharma PSUs to provide quality medicines at low prices. Under the scheme, several dedicated outlets 'PM Jan Aushadi Kendras' have been opened as one-stop destinations to procure required medicines.
- The Government intends to increase the number of Janaushadhi Kendras to 10,000 by the end of the year. The product basket includes 1759 drugs and 280 surgical instruments.

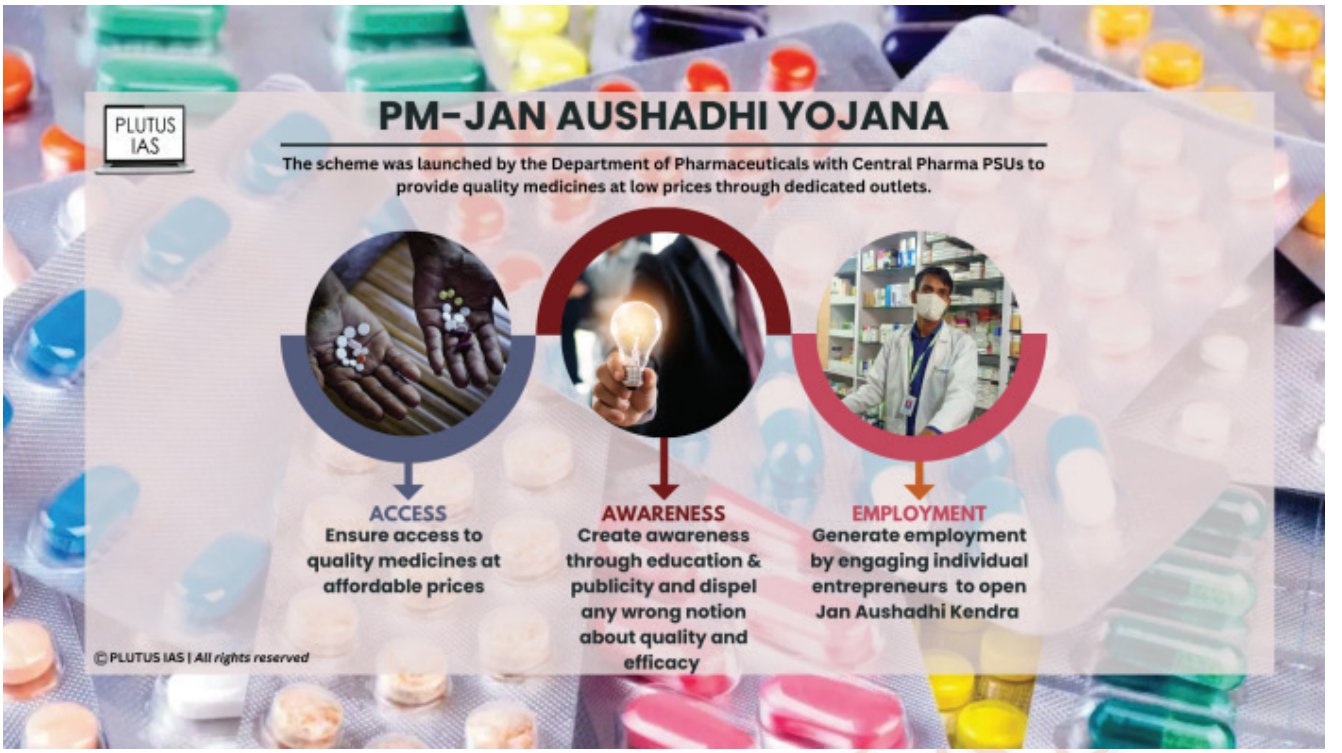
Objectives of the Scheme

The objectives of the scheme are:

Access: Ensure access to quality medicines at affordable prices.

Awareness: Create awareness through education and publicity and dispel notions about quality and efficacy.

Employment: Generate employment by engaging individuals to open Jan Aushadhi Kendras.



Performance of the scheme

The scheme has achieved tremendous growth and success in the last 8 years by providing quality medicines at cheaper costs to the people of India. This initiative has not only cut down the out-of-pocket expenditure of the poor sections but has also increased savings. The savings of more than Rs. 20000 crores is a significant achievement and shows that PMBJP has been able to make a positive impact on the lives of people by providing affordable healthcare.

What are the issues with the Scheme?

Despite the ambitious goal of providing affordable and quality medicines the scheme, it is also fraught with challenges, which are as follows:

- **Improper Inventory Management:** The inventory is not updated and there is an unavailability of medicines. This forces the patients to purchase the branded medicines by shelling out a large sum of money. This defeats the purpose of the scheme.
- **Lack of quality control and monitoring:** The medicines available at the stores are not of proper quality and standards. There is a need to check quality standards.
- **Location of Jan Aushadhi Kendras:** The Stores are not situated in the vicinity of a government hospital. The patients are discouraged to travel to long distances.
- **Issue of Quality perception:** The patients have a notion that inexpensive medicines that do not possess adequate efficacy. This perception of quality dissuades them to not purchase the medicines at the Jan AUshadhi Kendras. The low prices of the

medicines create the perception that the product is not of 'standard quality'.
- Inadequate Supply Chain Management: The demand for medicines and their supply is not in synchronisation. There is a need to streamline the process to ensure a shameless working of the scheme.

What steps can be taken to resolve the issues existing in the scheme?

The following steps can be taken to solve the issues existing in the scheme:
- Proper inventory management: There is a need to align the demand and supply with proper inventory management.
- Ensure proper quality control: The quality of the medicines needs improvement with regular quality checks and inspections. The perception regarding the low efficacy of medicines in comparison
- Opening accessible Stores: The location of stores should be planned considering the nearness of hospitals. They must also be opened in areas with a poor population.
- Incentives for doctors: Doctors play a key role in prescribing medicines. They must be incentivized to prescribe generic medicines in place of branded medicines.
- Integration with healthcare schemes: The scheme can be aligned with other schemes like Ayushmaan Bharat etc. This has the potential to widen the coverage and the targeted beneficiaries.

Way Forward

Overall, the success of Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana is a testament to the power of innovative ideas and effective implementation. It has brought about a significant positive change in the healthcare sector of India by providing affordable and quality medicines to people. This initiative has helped in reducing the financial burden of healthcare expenses and has made essential medicines accessible to all sections of society. It is essential that the government continues to support and promote initiatives like PMBJP, which have the potential to bring about positive change in the lives of millions of people.

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COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION IN INDIA

*This article covers "Daily current events "and the topic is about '**Compensatory Afforestation in India**' which is in the news, it covers "Environment" In GS-3, the following content has relevance for UPSC.*

For Prelims: Compensatory Afforestation in India
For Mains: GS-3, Environment

Why in news:

Compared to India's other two commitments, which are related to reducing carbon intensity and promoting renewable energy, the forestry goal is more difficult to achieve.

ABOUT COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION

- India's compensatory afforestation program, which seeks to ensure that forest lands getting "diverted" for non-forest purposes, like industrial or infrastructure development, is required to be accompanied by afforestation effort on at least an equal area of land, has been the centerpiece effort for expanding India's forest cover.
- The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act of 2016 makes compensatory afforestation a legal necessity. While the plantation exercise on new lands cannot be compared to the fully mature forests getting diverted, it does ensure that newer parcels of land are set aside for establishing them as forests.
- The law also recognizes that freshly wooded land cannot be expected to provide the same variety of goods and services that the diverted forests were offering, including lumber, bamboo, fuelwood, carbon sequestration, soil conservation, water recharge, and seed distribution.
- Hence, based on a computation chosen by an expert committee, project developers are also required to pay for the Net Present Value (NPV) of the forests being removed.
- Depending on the nature of the woods being transferred, firms are required to pay NPV at rates ranging between Rs 9.5 lakh and Rs 16 lakh per hectare.

THE COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION FUND ACT, 2016

- The National and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund is created under the Public Account of India, respectively.
- The following payments will be made to these Funds:
  - ◊ Compensatory afforestation
  - ◊ Net present value of forest
  - ◊ Other project-specific payments.
- 10% of these revenues will go to the National Fund, and the remaining 90% will go to the State Funds.

- These funds will mostly be used for infrastructure development, wildlife protection, ecosystem regeneration, and afforestation to make up for lost forest cover.
- The National and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority is also established under the Bill to oversee the National and State Funds.

HISTORY OF CAMPA

- The concept of compensatory afforestation has been around since the 1980s as a result of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, which required project developers to obtain "clearance" from the Environment Ministry before diverting any forest land. The compensatory afforestation law was only created in 2016, but the concept has been around since the 1980s.
- Observations made by the Supreme Court throughout the 1990s and 2000s proceedings of the well-known Godavarman case helped to institutionalize the practice.
- The funds acquired for compensatory afforestation before 2016 had, however, mostly gone unused due to unrelated disputes. Only since the 2016 Act has there been serious progress made on compensatory afforestation.
- The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India ordered the establishment of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund and Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) in 2001 as a result of the States' initial experiences with the underutilization of the funds raised for compensatory afforestation.
- Ad hoc CAMPA was established in 2006 for the management of the Compensatory afforestation Fund, and separate bank accounts were opened in which the compensatory levies were deposited.
- The Hon. Supreme Court authorized the transfer of Rs. 1000 crore to States and UTs annually in 2009 for compensatory afforestation and other initiatives.
- In 2014, the Honorable Supreme Court allowed states to withdraw 10% of their total contributions from the fund without being charged interest on those amounts.
- According to a clause in this Act, CAMPA funds must be retained in a public account that bears interest and is not lapsable.
- The fund flow system could be finalized, and the CAF Regulations were finally implemented in 2018 after extensive discussions with the CAG, Ministry of Finance, and other Stakeholders.
- On January 28, 2019, the Supreme Court approved the CAF Regulations, bringing a sum of Rs. 54,685 crores from the Ad-hoc CAMPA under the authority of the Indian government. 27 States and UTs have established accounts to date in order to receive funding from the Union Government, and today cash totaling Rs. 47,436 crores was transferred to those States.

PRESENT SITUATION

- Due to the necessity for quick industrial and infrastructure development as well as the ensuing urbanization, forests are under stress.
- More than 1,611 square km of forest land, or a little bit more than Delhi's area, has been cleared in the last 10 years for industrial or infrastructure developments. 529 sq km, or almost one-third of this, have been cleared just in the past three years.
- But, government data also reveals that in the two years between 2019 and 2021, the overall area covered by forests expanded by 1,540 square kilometers.

ISSUES

- Compensatory afforestation is viewed as a form of "greenwashing" because it has justified the removal of forests.
- Although forest removal for one reason or another cannot be completely stopped, compensatory afforestation is a useful way to try and partially make up for these losses.
- With various charges outlined in the law, more than Rs 66,000 crore has been realized in the Central Fund. Almost Rs 55,000 crore of this total had already been distributed to the state governments. Yet, a large portion of this money is still restricted to state government funds.
- According to official records, neither the money granted for these APOs nor the annual plans of operations by the state governments have fully utilized the resources at their disposal.
- Investigations have occasionally been ordered as a result of claims of improper use or diverting these funds.
- The major challenge for compensatory afforestation continues to be the shortage of suitable land, which is in addition to the low utilization of funds.
- Most of the time, the land that is made available for afforestation cannot be used for anything else and is frequently utterly unfit for raising plantations.

Way Forward

- To improve India's forest and tree cover, a number of tree planting, afforestation, and reforestation programs should be carried out.
- They include the national afforestation initiative, the Green India Mission, and the tree-planting campaigns alongside roads and railroads. A major portion of other well-known government initiatives like Namami Gange and the national rural employment guarantee plan (MGNREGS) also include afforestation.

Source:
Cag.gov.in

The Indian Express

DIGITAL INDIA BILL

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details the Digital India Bill which is in the process stage. The government is working on the bill and intends to present it in the forthcoming parliamentary session.

For Prelims:

a) Features of Digital India Bill.

For Mains: GS2, International Relations, and GS3, Maritime Security

a) Significance of Legal Framework.
b) Issues in this bill
c) Comparative study of the Digital India Bill and Data Protection Act.

Background: The Information Technology Act is the primary law in India that regulates entities on the internet, including social media platforms and e-commerce companies. However, it does not currently consider online misinformation to be illegal. Moreover, the offenses under the IT Act are largely adapted from the offline world, such as publishing private pictures of people without consent, sharing pornographic content, and disseminating child sexual abuse material.

WHAT IS DIGITAL INDIA BILL?

The Digital India Bill is a proposed bill that aims to replace the Information Technology Act, of 2000. It aims to create a new legal framework for regulating entities on the internet in India. The bill is expected to cover a wide range of issues related to electronic transactions, cybersecurity, data protection, privacy, and digital governance.

Digital India Bill

NEED OF DIGITAL INDIA BILL

With over 760 million internet users in India and the number expected to rise, laws are needed to establish new frameworks for citizens' rights, responsibilities, and data collection obligations. The Digital India Bill aims to replace the IT Act, of 2000, and provide a legal framework for regulating entities on the internet while promoting digital literacy and safeguarding citizens' privacy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DIGITAL INDIA BILL

The bill is expected to provide:

- **Legal Framework:** A legal framework for e-commerce, digital signatures, electronic records, and other electronic transactions.
- **Cybercrime:** To address cybersecurity and provide measures to prevent and prosecute cybercrimes.
- **Data protection and Privacy regime:** To safeguards the privacy of Indian citizens' personal information.
- **Digital Governance Framework:** To provide a framework for digital governance that will enable the delivery of government services through digital means.
- **Society empowerment:** To provide a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy in India.

The goal of the Digital India Bill

FEATURES

- **Regulatory body:** The bill aims to create a regulator for the internet that will oversee social media platforms, e-commerce websites, etc.
- **Balance rights of an individual and information for public use:** There is a need to balance the personal information of a person and the use of the information for other purposes like legal use, public use, etc.
- **Regulation of new technologies:** The bill in its updated version will include issues related to blockchain technology, artificial intelligence, big data, etc.
- **Address emerging security issues:** The bill aims to have provisions related to cybercrimes and e-commerce.

Issues with the regulation of the Internet: The regulation of the internet is a complex issue that poses several challenges, some of which include:

- **Balancing freedom of expression with regulation:** The internet provides a platform for free expression, but regulating content without infringing on free speech needs a delicate balance.
- **Jurisdictional challenges:** The internet is global, and it is challenging to regulate content that crosses international borders. This issue can create conflicts between different countries' laws and regulations.
- **Emerging technologies:** The pace of technological change makes it difficult to regulate emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT).
- **Privacy and data protection:** The internet enables the collection and processing of vast amounts of personal data, raising concerns about privacy and data protection.
- **Cybersecurity:** The internet is vulnerable to cyber-attacks, and regulating cybersecurity is challenging, as it requires collaboration between multiple stakeholders.

Way Forward

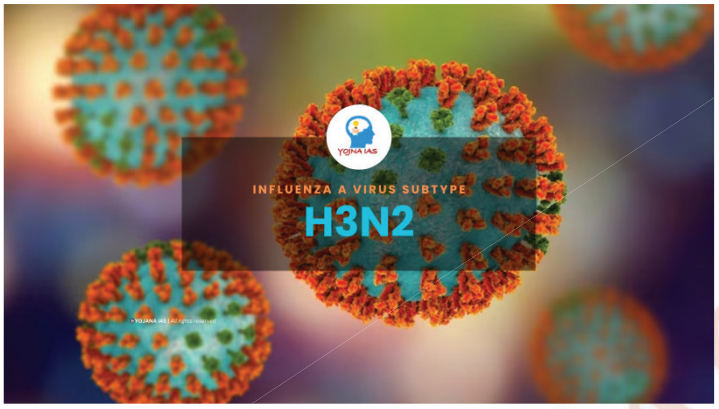
The introduction of the Digital India Bill must be welcomed as it aims to keep pace with time by adding new issues facing the internet. It also aims to strengthen the digital ecosystem and strengthen cyber security space. There is a need for consultation with all stakeholders to incorporate their viewpoints and present a lacunae-free law. The principles of openness, privacy, trust, and accountability must be put into force while making the law.

Sources:

The Hindu

H3N2

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details Influenza A virus subtype H3N2. Influenza A virus subtype H3N2 is a subtype of influenza-causing viruses that has claimed 2 lives in India. The government has brought out a plan to control the ensuing health crisis.



H3N2

For Prelims:

- About H3N2.
- Symptoms and cure.
- About influenza and its effect on humans and animals.

For Mains:

a) GS 2 – Health and Nutrition.
b) GS 3 – Science and Technology.
i) Government Efforts to control H3N2.
ii) WHO's directives.
iii) India's preparatory capabilities to deal with such outbreaks

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iii) India's preparatory capabilities to deal with such outbreaks.

Why in news:

Recently, the H3N2 virus has claimed two lives since mid-December last year. After a nationwide surveillance exercise, the Ministry said it had found at least 451 confirmed cases of the H3N2 virus since the beginning of this year.

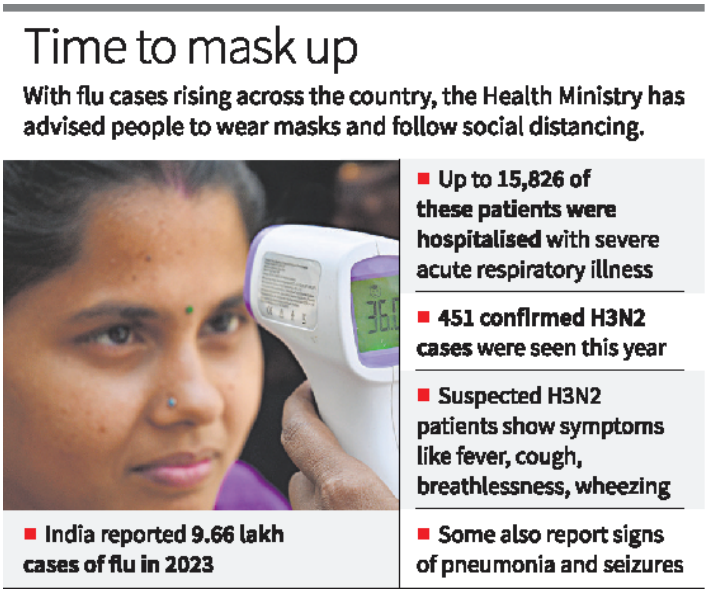
WHAT IS THE H3N2 VIRUS?

h3n2 flu

- Influenza is a kind of viral infection that mainly affects the respiratory system. It is caused by the influenza virus, which is highly contagious and can spread easily from person to person through respiratory droplets generated when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes.
- H3N2 virus is a subtype of the Influenza A virus. It is also known as the "Hong Kong flu" for its first detection in Hong Kong back in 1968.
- H3N2 is a highly contagious virus that spreads easily from person to person through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- H3N2 is known to cause more severe illness and death than other strains of the flu, particularly in older adults and people with weakened immune systems. The virus can also cause complications such as pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus infections.

FACTS RELATED TO THE H3N2 VIRUS

- Spread: The H3N2 influenza virus is highly contagious and can easily spread through the following:
  a) It can get transmitted from person to person contact via respiratory droplets which are generated when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes.
  b) By inhaling droplets from the air when they are in close proximity to an infected person.
- Symptoms: H3N2 are similar to those of other strains of influenza and may include:
  a) Fever
  b) Cough
  c) Sore throat
  d) Runny or stuffy nose
  e) Muscle or body aches
  f) Headache
  g) Fatigue
  h) Chills
  i) Nausea and vomiting (more common in children)
- Treatment: The treatment of the virus depends on the severity of symptoms and the presence of any complications. Mild cases of H3N2 infection can be managed with rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications to relieve symptoms such as fever, cough, and sore throat. Precautions: Prevention is key in avoiding H3N2 infection.
  a) Getting vaccinated against the flu each year is the best way to prevent getting infected with the H3N2 virus.
  b) Other preventive measures include practicing good hygiene, such as washing your hands frequently, covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Vulnerable groups
  a) Individuals in the age group 15-50 years.
  b) Children.
  c) People with co-morbidities like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, weakened immune systems, and neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions.
- Drugs for this virus
  a) There is no specific drug that can cure H3N2 or any other strain of the flu virus. However, there are antiviral medications available that can preempt the severity and complications.
  b) The most commonly prescribed antiviral medications for the flu are Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), Zanamivir (Relenza), and Peramivir (Rapivab).
  c) These medications work by blocking the influenza virus from multiplying in the body, which can help to shorten the duration of illness and reduce the severity of symptoms.



influenza h3n2

INDIAN GOVERNMENT ON INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

The Ministry of Health is taking appropriate measures to control the spread of influenza and provide necessary medical assistance to those affected.

- Real-time surveillance through a countrywide network of labs: A total of 3038 laboratory-confirmed cases of various subtypes of Influenza including H3N2 have been reported till 9th March 2023 by the States. The surveillance network comprised 27 DHR-ICMR Virus Research & Diagnostic Laboratories.
- Guidelines on seasonal Influenza: The Union Ministry of Health has provided guidelines on how to categorize patients and related protocols for treatment.

DRUGS AND LOGISTICS

- WHO recommends the drug Oseltamivir, which is provided for free through the Public Health System.
- In February 2017, the Indian Government authorized the sale of Oseltamivir under Schedule H1 of the Drug and Cosmetic Act to make it more accessible and available.
- The States have sufficient logistics in place, but the Government of India is prepared to assist in case of emergencies to help them manage the situation effectively.

Sources:

PIB
WHO
CDC
The Indian Express