

## India's disease burden and mission

### What is the issue?

- Since August 2019, India has embarked on a large-scale plan to screen all children for leprosy and tuberculosis.
- The existing Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) infrastructure will be used for the screening.

### How the screening will be done?

- An estimated 25 crore children below the age of 18 will be screened for these two infectious diseases.
- If a person is suspected to have either of the two, s/he will be sent to a higher centre for confirmation.

### Why is the screening necessary?

- **Leprosy** is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*.
- It usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves but has a wide range of clinical manifestations.
- It is a leading cause of permanent physical disability.
- Timely diagnosis and treatment of cases, before nerve damage has occurred, is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy.
- **Tuberculosis infection**, caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, is one of the most common communicable diseases in India.
- Its transmission is fueled by unhygienic, crowded living conditions.
- It is said that most Indians carry the bacterium and the infection flares up when their immunity levels are low.
- India's tuberculosis burden is the highest in the world.
- Children tend to be more prone to catching infectious diseases from their peers because of long hours in confined spaces and more bodily contact than in adults.

### What could be the solution?

- Addressing the problem early would ensure that the infection cycle is broken.
- In the case of leprosy, it could mean the prevention of disability.

- The programme would also give preventive medication to people who have come in contact with the confirmed cases.
- For TB, India's malnutrition burden is an additional risk factor which should be addressed soon.
- As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16), 35.7% children below age five are underweight, 38.4% are stunted (low height for age) and 21% are wasted (low weight for height) in the country.

### **What is the burden in India?**

- India eliminated leprosy in 2005 — WHO defines elimination as an incidence rate of less than one case per 10,000 population.
- All states except Chhattisgarh and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli have eliminated leprosy.
- However, 1.15 lakh to 1.2 lakh new leprosy cases are still detected every year, Health Ministry officials said.
- TB kills an estimated average of over 1,300 Indians every day.
- India also has more than a million “missing” cases every year that are not notified.
- Most remain either undiagnosed or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector.
- The problem is that many of these patients do not complete the full course of the antibiotic.
- This exposes the bacterium to the medicine without fully killing it, which is more than enough for the bacterium to evolve resistance to that particular drug.

### **What is the mission focus?**

- Launched in 2013 under the National Health Mission, RBSK is focused on preventing disease and disability in children.
- “Child Health Screening and Early Intervention Services” refer to early detection and management of a set of 30 health conditions prevalent in children less than 18 years of age.
- These conditions are together described as 4Ds and they are defects at birth, diseases in children, deficiency conditions and developmental delays including disabilities.
- Until now, neither leprosy nor TB was a part of the programme.
- In 2017, India had set a target of elimination of leprosy by 2018.
- The deadline has passed but leprosy remains a challenge in a country that launched the National Leprosy Eradication Programme way back in 1955.
- For tuberculosis, the global Sustainable Development Goal target is to end the disease is 2030.

- However, there is a new urgency in India's TB control efforts since 2018, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi suo motu advanced the deadline for India to end TB to 2025.

**Source: The Indian Express**

