

Notifiable Disease

Why in the News?

Recently, there have been calls to designate cancer as a notifiable disease in India.

- **Notifiable Disease** - A notifiable disease is one that physicians are legally required to report to public health authorities.
- The primary purpose of disease notification is to ensure that contagious diseases are kept under check.
- **Legal mandate** - Notification of infectious diseases is a legal mandate, and failing to report designated diseases could lead to legal consequences.
- **Infectious diseases** - These diseases typically include infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, and COVID-19.
- **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897** - This act provides the legal framework for notifying diseases in India.
- **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)** - The IDSP monitors notifiable diseases in India.
- The list of notifiable diseases differs from state to state as state governments are responsible for bringing out the notification.
- **Snake bite** - In 2024, the Indian government asked states to announce snakebites a notifiable disease to improve reporting and response mechanisms.
 - In **2024**, snakebite was made a notifiable disease, despite being a non-communicable condition.
- **Cancer as notifiable disease** - There has been argument to make cancer as notifiable disease to enhance surveillance, early detection and resource allocation.

Issues in Designating Cancer as a Notifiable Disease:

- **Lack of immediate public health threat** - Unlike infectious diseases, cancer does not spread through direct transmission or cause sudden outbreaks.
 - Cancer requires long-term management rather than emergency interventions.
- **Complex diagnosis** - It is a diverse group of diseases rather than a single condition, and its detection often requires complex diagnostic procedures.
- **Legal burden** - Mandatory reporting could impose unnecessary legal obligations on physicians.
- **Social stigma** - Cancer still carries social stigma, discouraging patients from seeking timely diagnosis.
- **Privacy concerns** - Notifiability generally does not account for privacy because disease notification is meant to preserve public health over individual confidentiality.

Alternative Approach

- The World Health Organization advocates mainly cancer registries, which mention notification as an option at the *individual level alone*.
 - Expanding the National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP).
 - Encourage voluntary reporting for accurate data collection.
 - Enhancing cancer screening initiatives for early detection.
 - Implementing robust follow-up mechanisms to track treatment outcomes.

India's National Cancer Registry Programme (1982) functions as a data collection mechanism for compiling crucial information on the demographics of cancer patients.

Reference

[The Hindu | Should cancer be a notifiable disease](#)

