3. Asbestos in Baby Powder

Prelims: Science & Technology
Mains: GS-II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

What to Study?

- Johnson & Johnson is recalling one lot of its Johnson’s Baby Powder after tiny amounts of asbestos contamination were found in samples from a single bottle purchased online.
- It was found that the contaminated bottle contained chrysotile fibers, a type of asbestos.

What is Talc?

- Talc is a clay mineral which is found in underground deposits. It’s the softest mineral ever known and that makes it useful in a wide range of consumer and industrial products.
- This mineral is used as a thickening agent and lubricant, is an ingredient in ceramics, paint and roofing material, and is also one of the main ingredients in many cosmetic products.
- Talc in powdered form, often in combination with corn starch, is widely used as baby powder (Talcum Powder).
- Asbestos is also found underground, and veins of it can often be found in talc deposits, leading to a risk of cross-contamination.

About Asbestos:

- Asbestos is a group of six naturally occurring fibrous minerals composed of thin, needle-like fibers. They are commonly known by their colours, as blue asbestos, brown asbestos, white asbestos, and green asbestos.

Applications of Asbestos:

- Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that can be pulled into a fluffy consistency. Asbestos fibers are soft and flexible yet resistant to heat, electricity and corrosion. These qualities make the mineral useful.
- Pure asbestos is an effective insulator, and it can be used in cloth, paper, cement, plastic and other materials to make them stronger.

Health impacts of Asbestos:

- Inspite of various applications of asbestos in strengthening and fireproofing of materials, it is banned in many of the countries.
- It is because when someone inhales or ingests asbestos dust, the mineral fibers can become forever trapped in their body.
Over decades, trapped asbestos fibers can cause inflammation, scarring and eventually genetic damage to the body’s cells.

A rare and aggressive cancer called mesothelioma is almost exclusively caused by asbestos exposure. Asbestos also causes other forms of cancer as well as progressive lung disease and asbestosis.

Microscopic asbestos fibers cannot be seen, smelled or tasted, and it is unsafe to sniff a substance suspected of being asbestos. To detect asbestos, a sample of questionable material must be sent to a lab for testing.