

### **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:**

- ▶▶ In spite 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.

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- ▶▶ 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.

