

6. COVID-19 can Help Deal with the Silent Tuberculosis Crisis

Prelims Syllabus: Governance

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues Arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Why in News?

- According to a WHO Information Note — ‘Tuberculosis and COVID-19’, there is a need to maintain TB services during effective response to COVID-19.
- It is important that the progress made in TB prevention and care is not reversed by the COVID19 pandemic

Highlights:

- It said that TB patients who have lung damage or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease may suffer from more severe illness if they are infected with COVID-19.
- Doctors claim that people suffering from TB and COVID-19 may have poorer treatment outcomes, especially if TB treatment is interrupted.

Significance for India:

- India accounts for 27 per cent of the world’s total TB patients and is among the top 8 countries with the highest number of TB cases.
- In 2018, as many as 4.4 lakh people died of TB in India which is 29 per cent of the total 1.5 million deaths due to TB in the world.
- Out of total 7 million cases reported in 2018 across the world, India had 2.69 million cases, while, according to data available, it missed out on tracking down 5.40 lakh cases.
- There is a stronger case for concurrent testing for both conditions in individuals even if the clinical picture is atypical.
- The pandemic can help trace 5.4 lakh missed out T.B patients as fear of Coronavirus will induce them for testing as symptoms for TB – fever, cough and difficulty in breathing – are almost similar to coronavirus.
- The current situation will also help identify people with latent TB – who have the disease but no symptoms.
- According to WHO, there are 25 percent of patients with latent TB.

Tuberculosis (TB):

- TB remains the world's Deadliest Infectious Killer.
- Each day, over 4000 people lose their lives to TB and close to 30,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease.
- Caused by the bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis, TB is an infectious disease.
- In most cases, TB affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect other sites (non pulmonary TB).
- Latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) is a state of persistent immune response to stimulation by Mycobacterium tuberculosis antigens without evidence of clinically manifested active TB.
- Someone has latent TB if they are infected with the TB bacteria but do not have signs of active TB disease and do not feel ill.
- It is a contagion disease, which spreads when the people who are sick with pulmonary TB expel bacteria into the air, for example by coughing.
- Rapid molecular test, Sputum smear microscopy, Culture-based methods are some of the diagnostic tests for TB.
- Without treatment, the mortality rate from TB is high.

Initiatives for TB in India:

- There is **Free Treatment** of TB in India.
- India aims to eliminate TB by 2025 under its National Strategic Plan, while the UN aims to eliminate TB by 2030.
- It is driven by the DETECT-TREAT-PREVENT-BUILD Approach.
- The focus is on early diagnosis of all the TB patients, prompt treatment with the right drugs and regimens along with suitable patient support systems including financial and nutritional support.
- This is supplemented by prevention strategies including active case finding, contact tracing and LTBI management in high risk populations, and airborne infection control.
- Mass BCG (bacillus Calmette-Guerin) vaccination to prevent TB.
- Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) was launched in 1993, offering free diagnosis and treatment for patients, rescuing them from otherwise sure death.
- A Rs 12,000 cr. allocation of fund over the next 3 years to fight TB.
- **A Public campaign:** TB Harega Desh Jeetega.