
4. ICMR asks States to stop using Rapid Tests

Prelims Syllabus: Medicine and Pharmaceuticals

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in News?

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has directed the States not to use the COVID-19 rapid testing kits for the next two days following reports of wide variations in results.

What is the Issue?

- The Rajasthan government decided to halt rapid antibody tests after an experts' team questioned the use of the newly distributed Chinese testing kits following inaccurate results.
- The health authorities had started the testing on those with symptoms at designated points recently.
- The quality issues with the test kits, currently being used to study community transmission, would put on hold survey in several States temporarily.
- The kits would be tested and validated by ICMR teams and an advisory on their use issued in the next two days.
- If they were found to be not up to the mark, replacements would be sought from the manufacturers.

What is Rapid Test?

- A rapid test is conducted to determine whether there has been any kind of recent viral infection in a person's body.
- When a pathogen enters a human body, specific antibodies are released as a response to the virus.
- A rapid test can detect the presence of such antibodies in blood, serum or plasma samples quickly, indicating a viral infection.
- Rapid testing is conducted usually to check for community transmission of a virus during an epidemic.
- Rapid tests can be used to conduct screening within the community and identify those with suspected infection, put them under observation and if required, subject them to the PCR test for coronavirus confirmation.

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- According to the health department, it is a simple test that can be done with a person's blood sample and will give out results within 10-30 minutes. It is also a low-cost test.

Way Forward:

- This has seriously hampered our efforts to get fast test results for starting the treatment and contain the spread of the virus.
- The advisory issued by the ICMR to the States to not use testing kits for the next two days was most unfortunate, as the medical apex body could not ensure good quality of testing kits.
- Even at this late stage, the Centre should take an urgent action to procure the equipment from reliable sources and supply them to the States to get the faster results and start the treatment for the affected.

