

1. E-pharmacy

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Health issued show cause notices to at least 20 companies, including Tata-1mg, Flipkart, Apollo, PharmEasy, Amazon, and Reliance Netmeds for selling medicines online.

Highlights

- The growth of e-pharmacy in India has been significant in recent years and is expected to grow at a robust growth rate of 21.28% compound annual growth rate during 2021-2027.
- The main factors driving this growth include increasing internet and smartphone penetration, rising healthcare costs, and a growing demand for convenience and accessibility.
- The acute need for doorstep delivery of drugs was felt during Covid-19. Nearly 8.8 million households used home delivery services during the lockdown.
- E-pharmacies call themselves facilitators of doorstep delivery and claim tie-ups with retail chemists for vending medicines.
- The sale, stock, offer for sale or distribution of drugs through online, internet or other electronic platforms without a licence have potential impact on quality of drugs and pose risk to public health.
- As there arises a cope of misuse of drugs through self-medication and indiscriminate use of the drugs.
- The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 regulates the import, manufacturing and distribution of drugs in India.
- However, there is no statutory definition of “e-pharmacy” either under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 or the Pharmacy Act, 1948.
- However, the electronic sale of physician-prescribed drugs from online drug store sites is expressed under the IT Act, 2000.
- There is a need to balance the interests of e-pharmacy businesses and offline pharmacists to create a level playing field. In an ecosystem that is moving towards a hybrid mode, all eyes are on the Ministry of Health which will have to effectively regulate the new way of doing e-commerce in the drug space.