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News: Leprosy

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Leprosy

- Leprosy is also known as **Hansen's disease**.
- Leprosy is a **chronic, progressive bacterial infection**.
- It is caused by a **bacterium** called Mycobacterium Leprae, which is an acid-fast rod-shaped bacillus.
- It is a **disease that leaves a terrifying image in its wake of mutilation, rejection, and exclusion** from society.
- It infects **Skin, Peripheral nerves, Upper respiratory tract and Lining of the nose**.
- Leprosy is **transmitted mainly by breathing airborne droplets from the affected individuals**. It can be **contacted at any age**. Leprosy is **curable** with the combination of drugs known as Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT).
- The 1st Phase of the World Bank supported the National Leprosy Elimination Project started from 1993-94. In the year 2001, after the global elimination was

achieved, India was among the 14 countries that missed the target of eliminating leprosy.

- The National Leprosy Eradication Programme that was launched after this, achieved the goal of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem, defined as less than 1 case per 10,000 Population, at the National Level in December 2005. In 2017, the SPARSH Leprosy Awareness Campaign was launched to promote awareness and address the issues of stigma and discrimination.
- In commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October 2019, the NLEP has prepared the comprehensive plan to reduce the grade to disability to less than one case per million people by October 2019.
- World Leprosy Day is observed every year on the last Sunday of January. In India, it is observed on 30th January every year, coinciding with the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- India's leprosy prevalence rate has declined from 57.2 per 10,000 in 1981 to 0.57 in 2025, marking a 99% reduction.

India's battle to eradicate Leprosy

Early Efforts

- **1954-55:** Launch of the National Leprosy Control Programme (NLCP) using Dapsone monotherapy (antibiotic medication).

- **1983:** NLCP transitioned to the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme) after WHO endorsed Multi Drug Therapy (MDT) in 1982.
- The introduction of MDT in India in 1983 revolutionized leprosy treatment, with therapy provided free of cost to patients through WHO support.

Key Outcomes under NLEP

- **Elimination Achieved:** India attained national leprosy elimination status (prevalence rate <1/10,000) in 2005 and sustained it.
- As of 2025, PR is 0.57 nationally, and Grade 2 disability has declined to 1.88 per million.
- **Reduced Transmission and Disability:** Child cases among new detections fell from 9.04% (2014-15) to 4.68% (2024-25).
- New case detection rate dropped from 9.73 to 7.0 per 100,000 in the same period.
- Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) coverage among eligible contacts improved to 92%.
- **National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2023-2027:** The NLEP is developing a new strategy aligned with the Global Leprosy Strategy 2021–2030 and the WHO

Neglected Tropical Diseases Roadmap, aiming to end leprosy transmission by 2030 and recover from the Covid-19 impact.

- It outlines the strategic interventions and lays out a clear-cut roadmap to achieve the goal of interruption in transmission of leprosy by 2027.

National and Global Initiatives to Eliminate Leprosy

At National Level

- **Nikusth 2.0 Portal:** Digitized system for patient tracking and district monitoring.
- **National AMR Surveillance for Leprosy (2023):** Tracks drug resistance trends.
- **Integration with Ayushman Bharat, Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) and Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK):** Ensures screening for all age groups.
- **PVTG Tagging:** Inclusion of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups under PM-JANMAN.
- **Special Monitoring:** For 121 districts with higher prevalence (>1/10,000).

Global Collaboration

- **WHO:** India–WHO collaboration ensures free MDT supply, technical support, and programme monitoring. WHO also supported Modified Leprosy Elimination Campaigns (MLECs), Special Action Projects for remote areas, and the COMBI (Communication for Behavioural Impact) pilot in Bihar.
- **World Bank:** Funded Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) and community–based interventions (1993–2004).