



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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DISRUPTED IMMUNISATION PROGRAMS DUE TO COVID-19

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "DISRUPTED VACCINATIONS DUE TO COVID-19". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "SOCIAL ISSUES" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

A recent publication in The Lancet Global Health titled "Estimating the Health Effects of Covid-19-Related Immunisation Disruptions in 112 Countries During 2020-30: A Modelling Study" underscores the decline in global Immunisation amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to heightened disease burden and outbreak susceptibility.

IMPORTANT FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

COVID-19 DISRUPTS IMMUNISATION, LEAVING CHILDREN VULNERABLE

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly **disrupted global Immunisation efforts**, leading to a **decline in vaccine coverage** and raising concerns about outbreaks and increased disease burden across various countries.

- **Measles Makes a Deadly Return:** Disruptions to vaccinations for **measles, rubella, HPV (Human Papillomavirus), Hepatitis B, meningitis A, and yellow fever** could lead to an estimated 49,119 additional deaths during the calendar years 2020-2030, with measles being the main contributor. This highlights the critical role that routine vaccinations play in preventing serious and potentially fatal illnesses.
- **Catch-Up Programs Offer Hope:** The study **emphasises the importance of catch-up vaccination programs, particularly for diseases like measles and yellow fever**, which experienced an immediate increase in cases following the pandemic. These programs have been shown to be effective in averting excess deaths, **with the potential to prevent approximately 79% of additional deaths related to these diseases**. Investing in catch-up programs can significantly improve public health outcomes.

MISSED VACCINATIONS AND MEASLES RESURGENCE

The pandemic's impact went beyond just delaying vaccinations. Disruptions also affected routine vaccinations, resulting in an **additional 6 million children globally missing out on their DTP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis) vaccines in 2021**. This highlights the importance of strengthening healthcare systems to ensure they can continue to deliver essential services even during crises.

- **A Global Measles Threat:** There has been a concerning **resurgence of measles cases reported in several countries**, including those where measles was previously considered eradicated, such as the United Kingdom and the United States. This resurgence is a direct consequence of declining vaccination rates.
- **2021 Delays, 2022 Outbreaks: COVID-19 disruptions led to a significant number of missed measles vaccine doses – nearly 61 million – in 18 countries in 2021.** This contributed to a rise in measles cases and deaths globally in 2022, particularly in countries with low vaccination rates, such as Nigeria, Pakistan, and India. This situation underscores the need for international collaboration to ensure equitable access to vaccines and strengthen Immunisation programs worldwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

The study offers valuable recommendations to help us recover from the setbacks caused by the pandemic and ensure long-term public health benefits.

- **Prioritise Catch-Up Efforts:** The research suggests that implementing catch-up vaccination activities **could potentially avert 78.9% of excess deaths between calendar years 2023 and 2030.** However, for these programs to be most effective, they need to be implemented promptly and targeted towards the specific cohorts and regions most affected by disruptions. This targeted approach can significantly improve vaccine coverage and mitigate the adverse effects of under-immunisation.
- **Continued Immunisation Efforts Remain Crucial:** The importance of sustained Immunisation efforts, particularly for vaccines like HPV, which play a crucial role in preventing cervical cancer, cannot be overstated. The study **emphasises the necessity of ongoing vaccination campaigns even amidst disruptions to ensure long-term public health benefits.** By prioritising catch-up programs, targeted interventions, and continued Immunisation efforts, we can mitigate the negative effects of vaccine coverage decline and ensure a healthier future for all.

MAJOR INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT RELATED TO IMMUNISATION

- **Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP):** This is the backbone of India's Immunisation strategy, offering a range of vaccines to children and pregnant women.
- **Mission Indradhanush:** Launched in 2014, this special drive focuses on reaching unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children in high-focus districts to achieve at least 90% full Immunisation coverage.
- **Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN):** This digital system tracks vaccine stocks and temperature across all storage levels, ensuring smooth logistics and proper storage conditions.
- **Measles-Rubella (MR) Campaign:** Recent campaigns like the 2023 MR drive aim to bridge the gap in measles and rubella immunisation.

WAY FORWARD

- **Community Engagement:** Public awareness campaigns promoting the importance of vaccination and addressing vaccine hesitancy are critical. Engaging community leaders and healthcare providers can build trust and encourage vaccine uptake.
- **Data-Driven Strategies:** Utilising real-time data to identify areas with low vaccination rates and track outbreaks allows for targeted interventions and resource allocation.

- **Innovation in Vaccine Delivery:** Exploring new vaccine delivery methods, such as mobile clinics and community outreach programs, can improve access to immunisation services, particularly in remote areas.

PRELIMS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. Consider the following statements

1. Adenoviruses have single-stranded DNA genomes, whereas retroviruses have double-stranded DNA genomes.
2. An adenovirus sometimes causes the common cold, whereas a retrovirus causes AIDS.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER: B

MAIN PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. How do disruptions in vaccination programs exacerbate existing inequalities within society, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions?

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IAS