



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Leprosy

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Why is in news? Urgently address gaps in leprosy services, says WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Sunday **urged countries, especially those in the Southeast Asia Region**, to urgently address gaps in leprosy services disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organisation asked the countries to accelerate efforts towards **achieving the goal of zero leprosy disease**, stigma and discrimination — the **vision of the WHO Global Leprosy Strategy 2021-2030**.

Leprosy is **100% curable when detected early**, yet today in addition to COVID-related challenges, discrimination and stigma continue to impede prompt diagnosis and treatment.

Leprosy is a **chronic, curable infectious disease** mainly causing skin lesions and nerve damage.

Leprosy is caused by infection with the **bacterium Mycobacterium leprae**. It mainly affects the **skin, eyes, nose and peripheral nerves**.

Leprosy can be cured with 6-12 months of **multi-drug therapy**. **Early treatment avoids disability**.

Symptoms include light-coloured or red skin patches with reduced sensation, numbness and weakness in hands and feet. Also pain in the joints, blister, loss of colour, rashes, ulcers, or redness, reduced sensation of touch, pins and needles, or loss of temperature sensation and nerve injury or weight loss.

The **World Health Organization (WHO) reports that leprosy is endemic in several Indian states and union territories**, with an annual case detection rate of 4.56 per 10,000 population. India reports more than 1,25,000 new patients of leprosy every year.

National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP):

It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the **umbrella of National Health Mission (NHM)**.

India has achieved the **elimination of leprosy as a public health problem** i.e., defined as less than 1 case per 10,000 populations, at the National level.

The NLEP **aims at eliminating** leprosy in each of the districts **by 2030**.

In 2017, **SPARSH Leprosy Awareness Campaign** was launched to promote awareness and address the issues of stigma and discrimination.

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**