Hepatitis A

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Health*

Why in news?

In recent years, multiple outbreaks of Hepatitis A in India have caused acute liver failure, making a strong case for its inclusion in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

World Hepatitis Day - ***July 28***

- **Hepatitis A –** It is a ***highly contagious liver infection*** caused by the hepatitis A virus.
- Unlike hepatitis B and C, it does not cause chronic liver disease or permanent liver damage, and most people recover completely.
- **Transmission & Causes –**
  - The virus is primarily spread through the fecal-oral route, meaning a person ingests food or water contaminated with the feces of an infected person.
  - The disease is closely associated with unsafe water or food, inadequate sanitation, poor personal hygiene and oral-anal sex.
- **Symptoms –**
  - Usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure and are often mild, especially in young children.
  - They can last for several months in adults and may include fatigue, nausea & vomiting, abdominal pain (upper right side), fever, loss of appetite, jaundice, itching, etc.
- **Risk factors –** Poor sanitation, unsafe water, and inadequate hygiene practices.
- **Treatment –** There is ***no specific antiviral treatment*** for hepatitis A, instead it typically involves ***supportive care*** to manage symptoms and keep the patient comfortable.
- **Prevention –** Improved sanitation, food safety, safer sex practices

(notably for oral-anal sex) and immunization are the most effective ways to combat hepatitis A.

- India has its own ***indigenous vaccine - Biovac-A***, a live-attenuated vaccine for Hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B vaccine is already part of UIP).

- **WHO's Global Hepatitis Report, 2024**
  - Viral hepatitis causes over 1 million deaths annually, mostly from Hepatitis B and C and Hepatitis is now the ***2nd leading*** infectious killer after tuberculosis.
  - India carries a high burden of Hepatitis A, B, and E, with Hepatitis A increasingly causing acute liver failure.
  - **2030 Targets** – WHO aims to reduce new infections by 90% and deaths by 65%.

References

1. The Hindu | Hepatitis A deserves a place in India's UIP
2. WHO | Hepatitis A
3. CDC | Hepatitis A

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