Homoeopathic Drug Arsenicum album - Covid-19

What is the issue?

- The Ministry of AYUSH listed a homoeopathic drug, Arsenicum album 30 among prophylactic (preventive) medicine against Covid-19.
- On several states recommending it, concerns are being raised from various circles.

What is Arsenicum album?

- Arsenicum album is considered to correct inflammation in body.
- It takes care of diarrhoea, cough and cold.
- It is used commonly by homeopaths to treat anxiety, restlessness, cold, ulcerations, burning pains, etc.
- Arsenicum album is made by heating arsenic with distilled water.
- The process is repeated several times over 3 days.
- Arsenicum album is taken in powder form or as a tablet.
- A small bottle with one course costs Rs 20-30.

What was the recommendation made?

- In January 2020, the Scientific Advisory Board of the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH) opined on the drug.
- Accordingly, Arsenicum album 30 could be taken as prophylactic medicine against Coronavirus infections.
- The CCRH released a fact sheet stating this medicine is only a “possible prevention” against flu.
- Soon, the AYUSH Ministry recommended taking the medicine for 3 days on an empty stomach.
- The dose is advised to be repeated after a month if COVID-19 outbreak continues locally.
- Recently, the Ministry released another notification with “preventive and prophylactic simple remedies” against Covid-19-like illness.
- Among them, it listed Arsenicum album 30 as a homeopathic solution.
- Homeopathy has reportedly been used for prevention during the epidemic of cholera, Spanish influenza, yellow fever, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid, etc.

How prevalent is its use now?

- Arsenicum album 30 has been recommended by some state governments.
- These include Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.
- The Maharashtra government is yet to take a formal decision.
- But the Mumbai civic authorities have been distributing the drug to high-risk populations in at least two wards.
- The Haryana prisons department and Mumbai police too are also distributing the drug to prisoners and officers respectively.
- Even in states that have no protocol for using the drug against Covid-19, people are reportedly getting to homeopathic clinics to buy the drug.
- Even local chemists have started stocking this medicine.
- The Central Drug Standard Control Organisation recently issued a notification in this regard.
- It allowed private practitioners to try alternative remedies like Ayurveda and homoeopathy to treat Covid-19.

What are the concerns?

- It is said that Arsenicum album has less than 1% arsenic.
- But the health hazards of arsenic contamination in water are well known.
- Long-term exposure to the metal can cause skin cancer, pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases.
- There is no scientific evidence that the drug works against Covid-19.
- The Ayush Ministry has based its recommendation on existing use of the medicine for respiratory illness and influenza.
- Several homeopaths themselves point out that each individual reacts differently to homeopathic medicines.
- Certainly, one medicine cannot be universally held as a prophylactic for all; it can only be a part of the treatment, if at all.
- **Maharashtra** - The Maharashtra government has set up a task-force in this regard.
- This is to evaluate the homoeopathic drug and decide whether it should be used against Covid-19.
- The members however remain undecided yet.
- But, Maharashtra is allowing the drug’s use as an immunity booster, like vitamin C tablets.
- It was not encouraging it as a prophylactic.
- There is no scientific evidence that it works as prophylactic, and it is not being encouraged universally for everyone.

Is it rightful to use an untested drug?

- A recommendation made by an expert committee in the WHO during the 2014 Ebola outbreak is worth mentioning here.
- It said that it was 'ethical' to offer unproven interventions with as yet unknown efficacy and adverse effects, as potential preventive treatment.
- This was keeping in view that no vaccine or anti-virals were available.
- But the WHO has no guidelines on using Arsenicum album as a Covid-19 treatment either.
- Notably, the ICMR too has not issued any guidelines regarding the medicine.
- In all, the AYUSH Ministry could have conducted trials to assess the efficacy of the drug before recommending it.

Source: Indian Express

