Hydroxychloroquine

Why in news?

The Indian government has decided to ease its recent ban on the export of hydroxychloroquine.

What is hydroxychloroquine?

- It is an anti-malarial drug option.
- It is considered less toxic than chloroquine.
- It is also prescribed for patients of rheumatoid arthritis and lupus.

Who makes this drug in India?

- Hydroxychloroquine had a market size of only around Rs 152.80 crore.
- However, several countries source the drug from India.
- Mumbai based Ipca Laboratories has nearly 82% of the market, with its brands HCQS and HYQ.
- Around 80% of the volumes produced by Ipca are exported.
- Ahmedabad-headquartered Cadila Healthcare has 8% of the market.

Why has hydroxychloroquine gained attention now?

- The International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents (IJAA), reported that Azithromycin (antibiotic) added to hydroxychloroquine was significantly more efficient for COVID-19 elimination.
- However, the study was flagged as being too small to draw a definitive conclusion.
- However, by late March 2020, Trump had begun to call the drug a “game changer”, and has since been pushing it.
- At the end of March 2020, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) issued an advisory.
- It recommended the use of hydroxychloroquine in asymptomatic healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients.
- ICMR also allowed doctors to prescribe it for household contacts of confirmed COVID-19 patients.
- However, the government has stressed that the drug can only be used in COVID-19 treatment on prescription, and that it should not instill a sense of “false security”.

- The drug was then moved to a Schedule H1 status.
- This means patients that who needed the drug would have to get a fresh prescription every time they purchased it.
- Following the ICMR's advisory on the drug, various patients and healthcare professionals are learnt to have stocked up hydroxychloroquine.

Why did India ban the exports?

- Trump's statement promoting the drug not only led to panic buying in the US, but also impacted stocks in India.
- So the government banned the export of hydroxycloroquine with immediate effect, to ensure sufficient availability in the domestic market.

Why did India lift the ban now?

- The US President warned about "retaliation" if India did not heed his request for the drug.
- India clarified that it would supply to countries that needed it the most, and to neighbours who were "dependent on India's capabilities".
- Following this, India partially lifted the ban on the drug.
- So now, exports of hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol will be allowed depending on the availability of stock after meeting domestic requirements and existing orders.
- Shipments will be restricted and permission will be on humanitarian grounds.
- This move was from the recommendation of an expert panel led by drug pricing regulator Shubhra Singh.
- The panel got enough evidence from the companies on the available stocks in the country.

Source: The Indian Express

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