Influenza Vaccination Strategy

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance*

Why in news?

In India, the burden of influenza is substantial but often underestimated, led *to rethink India's influenza vaccination strategy*

- **Influenza –** Flu or influenza, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infects the nose, throat, and lungs.
- **Caused by –** Influenza virus.
- **Symptoms –** Include fever, head and body aches, coughing and a stuffy or runny nose.
- Worldwide, it's a major cause of respiratory illness, hospitalization, and deaths, especially among children, older adults, and people with underlying medical conditions.
- **Prevention –** The best way to prevent the flu is to get an annual flu vaccine.
- **India's influenza outbreaks –** Two distinct peaks - during the winter months (January-March) and in the post-monsoon period (July-September).
- **Vaccines available in India –** Inactivated influenza vaccines, administered by injection, and live attenuated vaccines, given as a nasal spray.

  Currently, influenza vaccines ***aren't part*** *of the Universal Immunization Program (UIP).*

- Despite flu vaccines having been available for over a decade now, ***less than 5% of Indians receive them.***
- **Reason for low vaccination –** Perception that influenza is a minor illness, limited public awareness, and an absence of government policy support.
- **Major concern –** Standard influenza vaccines only provide 3 to 6 months of protection, leaves the population vulnerable for a significant portion of the year.
- Thus, an annual influenza vaccine doesn't fit India's reality.
- **New alternatives –**
  - To introduce a ***biannual influenza vaccination*** schedule backed by government policy for India;
  - By including it in the UIP;
  - Invest in more robust, community-level surveillance; and
  - Coupled with public awareness campaigns.

Reference

[The Hindu | Rethink India’s influenza vaccination strategy]