

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](#)

