Malaria Elimination Efforts in India

Mains: *GS-II – Polity & Governance | Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*

Why in News?

India has reduced malaria cases by nearly 80% between 2015 and 2023 and is on track to meet its 2030 elimination target, though challenges like migration, urban transmission, and drug resistance remain.

What was India's malaria elimination journey?

- **Target –** India set an ambitious target to ***eliminate malaria (zero indigenous cases) by 2030*** under National Framework for Malaria Elimination in India (2016-2030).
- **Interim milestone** – Interrupting indigenous transmission across the entire country, including all high-transmission States and Union Territories (UT), including high-burden regions by 2027.
- **Current Status**
  - In 2023, 34 States/UTs achieved an annual parasite incidence of less than one except in two States, Tripura (5.69) and Mizoram (14.23).
  - By the end of 2025, 160 districts in 23 States/UTs had reported zero indigenous cases between 2022 and 2024, marking steady progress toward India's 2027 interim target.
- **Key drivers of the progress** – The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) credits robust surveillance systems and sustained interventions (testing, treatment, vector control).
- **Core measures include**
  - Strengthen surveillance systems and diagnostic capacity.
  - Intensify control efforts in high-burden districts.
  - Monitor drug resistance and insecticide resistance.
  - Ensure compliance with 14-day radical treatment for Plasmodium vivax.

To know about Malaria disease, click here

How is prevalence of the disease measured?

- **WHO Certification –** According to the WHO, a country is granted a certification of malaria elimination when
  - The chain of local transmission of all human malaria parasites has been interrupted nationwide for at least three consecutive years, and
  - A fully functional surveillance and response system is in place to prevent re-establishment of indigenous transmission.
- This ensures imported cases don't spark new outbreaks.
- Surveillance includes mandatory reporting, rapid diagnostics, and vector monitoring.
- **Global Status** – As of mid-2025, *47 countries or territories* have been officially certified malaria-free by the WHO.
- **Recently certified countries** – Georgia (2025), Egypt (2024), Cabo Verde (2024), and Suriname (2025).
- **Other examples include**
  - **Europe** - Entire region certified malaria-free.
  - **Asia-Pacific** - Countries like Sri Lanka (2016) and China (2021).
  - **Africa** - Algeria (2019) and Morocco (2010).
  - **Americas** - Paraguay (2018) and El Salvador (2021).

How does the World Malaria Report 2025 assess India's progress?

- **India Exits WHO High Burden Group** – India made significant progress in reducing malaria incidence and mortality in its high-endemic States, officially exiting the WHO ***"High Burden to High Impact" Group***, in 2024.
- **Case reduction** – Malaria cases reduced by *around 80%* from 2015 to 2023 in the country.
- **Regional share –** In 2024, India accounted for 73.3% of the 2.7 million estimated malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region.
- Over the past two decades, the region has achieved major reductions in malaria cases and deaths, according to WHO South-East Asia region.
- **On track for WHO GTS target** – India is on track to meet the WHO Global Technical Strategy (GTS) goal of cutting malaria cases by 75% by 2025, compared to 2015 levels, having already reduced them by over 70% in 2024.

What findings are shown in the Tamil Nadu case study?

- **Steady decline** – As per the State's Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine show a ***steady decline in malaria cases***, from 5,587 in 2015 to 321 in 2025.
- **District classification** (since 2023) -
  - **Category O** (Prevention of re-establishment) - 33 of 38 districts with zero indigenous cases.
  - **Category I** (Elimination phase) - 5 districts, including Chennai, where API is less than 1 per 1,000 population at risk.
- **Annual Parasite Incidence (API)** – API is the number of confirmed new malaria cases registered in a specific year, expressed per 1,000 individuals under surveillance, for a given country, territory, or geographic area.
- **Measures taken by TN**
  - **Detection & Diagnosis** - Intensive malaria testing in government hospitals and primary health centres.
  - **Larval Control** - Regular measures to reduce mosquito breeding.
  - **Migrant Worker Surveillance** – Intensive surveillance is being taken up among workers coming from malaria-prone neighbouring States.

How is India working to eliminate malaria?

- **2 national plans** - to guide and accelerate malaria elimination —
- **National Framework for Malaria Elimination in India (2016-2030)** – Outlines the vision, goals, and targets for a phased malaria elimination by 2030, and
- **National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Malaria Elimination (2023-2027)** – Builds upon earlier frameworks and focuses on -
  - Transforming malaria surveillance as a core intervention for malaria elimination,
  - Ensuring universal access to diagnosis, treatment by enhancing and optimising case management by "testing, treating and tracking" and
  - Ensuring universal access to prevention by enhancing and optimising vector control.

What are the challenges?

- **Migration & Cross-Border Importation** – Movement of people from malaria-endemic neighbouring States risks reintroducing malaria into low-

transmission areas.

- **Urban Transmission** – Cities face unique risks due to rapid urbanisation, expanding infrastructure, and widespread apartment complexes where water storage can become breeding grounds.
- **Hard-to-Reach Populations** – The special focus is needed in urban, forest, tribal, project/border areas, and among migrant workers.
- **Persistent transmission** – The Plasmodium vivax transmission accounts for nearly two-thirds of regional cases, continues to complicate elimination efforts.
- **Localised transmission** – In India and Nepal, population movement and cross-border importation drive localised outbreaks, highlighting the need for targeted subnational and regional coordination.
- **Antimalarial Drug Resistance** – WHO reports partial resistance to artemisinin in eight African countries, with partner drugs also showing reduced effectiveness, raising concerns for future malaria treatments.

What lies ahead?

- **Data Accuracy** – Reliable and precise data is essential at this stage to guide malaria elimination efforts.
- **Surveillance** – Private practitioners must be included in strict public health surveillance, with mandatory reporting of even suspected malaria cases.
- **Fighting Urban Malaria Together** – Addressing Urban Malaria needs both government initiatives and household-level action, as clean stored water often becomes the source of mosquito breeding.

Reference

[The Hindu | Can India eliminate malaria by 2030?]

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