Measles Outbreak in New York, US

What is the issue?

- New York recently declared a public health emergency and ordered mandatory vaccinations for measles in a part of its Brooklyn town.
- This has led to concerns over the resurgence of measles in New York and elsewhere.

What is measles?

- Measles is a highly contagious viral disease.
- It typically begins with a high fever. Several days later a characteristic rash appears on the face and then spreads over the body.
- Among serious complications, 1 in 20 patients gets pneumonia.
- 1 in 1,000 gets brain swelling, possibly leading to seizures, deafness or intellectual disability.
- While it's rare in the U.S., about 1 in every 1,000 children who get measles dies.
- **Spread** - Measles is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons.
- So it spreads by coughing or sneezing, and someone can spread the virus for 4 days before the rashes appear.
- The virus can live for up to 2 hours in the air or on nearby surfaces.
- 9 of 10 unvaccinated people who come into contact with someone with measles will catch it.
- **Vaccine** - Known as the MMR vaccine, it protects against measles, mumps and rubella.
- Two shots are required, one around the first birthday and a second between age 4 and 6.
- Full vaccination is 97% effective at preventing measles.

What is the recent outbreak in the US?

- There were 285 measles cases in the New York city since September, 2018.
- In the US, there have been 465 cases of measles so far in 2019, two-thirds of them in New York state.
- This compares to 372 cases in the U.S. for all of last year.
- Besides New York, there have been outbreaks this year in Washington state,

California, Michigan and New Jersey.
- The disease was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, but evidently, cases have been rising in recent years.
- This means that it is currently not being spread domestically.
- Possibly, unvaccinated Americans travelling abroad, or foreign visitors in America, are bringing in the virus.

How is it elsewhere?

- Measles is far more common around the world; the World Health Organization (WHO) said measles claimed 110,000 lives in 2017.
- The WHO reports that there had been a 30% increase in measles cases in recent years.
- E.g. a huge outbreak in Madagascar has caused more than 115,000 illnesses and more than 1,200 deaths since September, 2018
- Common tourist destinations like England, France, Italy and Greece had measles outbreaks last year.
- Nearly 83,000 people contracted measles in Europe in 2018, the highest number in a decade.

How vulnerable are children in the U.S.?

- Most of the reported illnesses are in children; roughly 80% of those affected are at age 19 or younger.
- Overall about 92% of U.S. children have gotten the combination vaccine.
- But 1 in 12 children in the U.S. do not receive the first dose on time.
- In some places vaccination rates are far lower than the national average.
- E.g. an outbreak in Washington state is linked to a community where only about 80% of children were properly vaccinated

What are the challenges to vaccination?

- The current spread is partly the result of misinformation that makes some parents avoid the crucial vaccine.
- [In the late 1990s, a study linked MMR vaccine to autism but it was found to be a fraud.
- Later research found no risk of autism from the vaccine.]
- Moreover, some people cannot be immunized for medical reasons including infants and people with weak immune systems.
- Vaccination against a list of contagious diseases is required to attend school in the U.S.
- But 17 states allow some type of non-medical exemption for personal, moral, religious or other beliefs.

- E.g. some in New York’s Orthodox Jewish communities have some religious principles against taking vaccination
- Lawmakers are learnt to be debating on ending such personal or philosophical exemptions.

Source: Indian Express

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