National Family Health Survey-6

Mains: *GSI Indian Society & GS II - Governance*

Why in News?

India made significant progress in maternal and child health, with improvements in vaccination and hospital births, and a drop in stunting and severe wasting among young children, according to the National Family Health Survey-6.

What is National Family Health Survey (NFHS)?

- NFHS is a large-scale, multi-round household survey conducted across India.
- It provides vital, nation- and state-level data on ***population, health, and nutrition.***
- **Managed by -** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- **Conducted by -** Mumbai's International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS).
- **Survey Rounds -** Since its inception, 5 major rounds of the NFHS have been completed, with a 6th rolling out - **NFHS-6** (2023-2024).

What are the Key Data's tracked by NHFS?

- The NFHS gathers information on a wide range of public health and demographic indicators:
- **Demographics -** Fertility rates, family planning methods, and mortality rates (infant, child, and maternal).
- **Maternal & Child Health -** Antenatal care, delivery care, vaccinations, and breastfeeding practices.
- **Nutrition & Health Status -** Anemia, stunting, wasting, and Body Mass Index (BMI) for children and adults.
- **Emerging Issues -** Domestic violence, knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and access to sanitation.

What are the Key Highlights of NFHS-6?

- The survey shows significant progress in basic health, universal immunization, and financial protection while flagging a critical shift toward lifestyle diseases and a dual burden of nutrition.

Metric / Indicator	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	NFHS-6 (2023-24)
Total Fertility Rate (TFR)	2.0	**2.0**
Institutional Deliveries	88.6%	**90.6%**
C-Section Deliveries	21.5%	**27.2%**
Stunting (Under 5)	35.5%	**29.3%**
Severe Wasting (Under 5)	7.7%	**5.2%**
Full vaccination among children aged 12 to 23 months (95.6% of infants under 6 months were being breastfed)	83.8%	**87.1%**
Health Insurance Coverage	41.0%	**60.2%**
Women's Internet Usage	33.3%	**64.3%**
Women with Active Bank Accounts	78.6%	**89.0%**

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) *is the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime if she survives through her childbearing years and experiences current age-specific fertility rates.*

Stunting *refers to impaired physical and cognitive growth in children, defined as having a height significantly lower than the standard for their age.*

Wasting *refers to the process where a person is too thin for their height, resulting from recent, severe weight loss or an inability to gain weight.*

- **Maternal health progress -** India’s total fertility rate held steady at 2.0 in 2023-24, just under the replacement threshold of **2.1%,** while the contraceptive prevalence rate rose from 66.7% to 69.1%.
- The survey highlights progress in maternal health services across the

country, with 95.9% of pregnant women receiving antenatal care, including
    - 76.2% in the first trimester, an increase from 70% in the previous survey period.
- Mothers receiving at least 4 antenatal care visits also increased from 58.5% to 65.2%.
- Maternal nutrition indicators also showed improvement, with mothers consuming iron folic acid supplements for 100 days or more during pregnancy rising from 44.1% to 54.9%.
- Those consuming supplements for 180 days or more rose from 26% to 37.8%.
- **Increasing Use of Hygiene -** It found that the use of hygienic methods of menstrual protection among women age **15-24 years** has increased from 77.6% to 79.2%.
- **Rise in Health insurance coverage -** Health insurance or financing scheme coverage expanded significantly from 41% to 60.2% at the household level.
- **Doubling in Internet Usage -** The percentage of women who have used the internet nearly doubled from 33.3% to 64.3%.
- Women having a mobile phone that they use themselves rose from 53.9% to 63.6%.
- **Increase in Bank Account Usage -** Women having a bank or savings account that they use themselves rose from 78.6% to 89%.

What are the Architectural & Methodological Changes in NFHS-6?

- NFHS-6 expanded its canvas to adapt to India's evolving socio-economic and digital needs:
- **Expanded Footprint -** Surveyed approximately 6.79 lakh households across 715 districts (covering all States/UTs except Manipur due to security situations).
- **Technological Shift -** Fully utilized *Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI),* facilitating real-time data checks and higher data integrity.
- **New topics added** - Direct Bank Transfer (DBT) and Self-Help Group (SHG) coverage, digital literacy and financial transactions, etc.
- The scope of clinical, anthropometric, and biochemical testing (CAB) has also been expanded to include HIV testing.
- **New Modular Additions -** Integrated metrics on
    - **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** coverage,

    - **Self-Help Group (SHG)** footprints,
    - Advanced digital literacy, and
    - Expanded biochemical testing (including HIV testing).

What are the key challenges posed by the survey?

- The survey flagged the increase in non-communicable diseases, lifestyle-related risks, and the dual burden of undernutrition and increasing obesity among adults as persistent health challenges.
- **The C-Section Surge - National Trend -** C-section deliveries rose from 21.5% to 27.2%, far exceeding the WHO's optimal threshold of 10–15%.
- **Sectoral Disparity -** Private hospitals recorded 54.1% C-sections compared to just 16.9% in public health facilities, highlighting a commercialized trend in private maternal care.
- **Spatial Divide -** Urban areas clocked a 40% C-section rate, driven heavily by urban corporate healthcare centers.
- **Rising Adult Obesity - 5-Year Surge (2019–2024)** - Overweight/obese individuals in the 15–49 age group increased by 6.7 percentage points for women and 4.4 percentage points for men.
- **Gender Indicator -** Women's obesity rate jumped significantly from 24% to 30.7%.
- **Urban-Rural Divide** - Obesity remains heavily concentrated in cities. Urban areas reported 42.8% of women as overweight or obese, nearly double the rural rate of 25.5%.
- Thus, India is shifting from infectious-disease burdens to lifestyle-centric, chronic NCD risks (such as diabetes and hypertension).
- **Rising Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) -** The obesity footprint is moving alongside elevated blood sugar and hypertension metrics.
- This threatens to create a massive out-of-pocket health expenditure crisis for families, as public infrastructure remains primarily geared toward acute and communicable disease treatments.
- **Persistent Under-5 Vulnerability -** Despite structural drops in stunting and severe wasting, roughly **1 in every 3** Indian children still suffers from chronic undernutrition, showing a slow rate of nutritional transition.
- **The Omission of Anaemia Biomarkers -** One of the biggest debate points in NFHS-6 was the official removal of blood-drawn anaemia testing.
- Critics argue that removing this biomarker undercuts longitudinal tracking of the Anaemia Mukt Bharat strategy, making it difficult to assess iron-deficiency trends on the ground.

What is the way forward?

Maternal Health & Private Sector

- **Mandatory Auditing** - Enforce strict audits for private hospitals exceeding WHO's 10–15% C-section threshold.
- **Decouple Incentives** - Implement flat-rate delivery packages to eliminate profit-driven surgeries.
- **Scale Midwifery** - Expand the Nurse Practitioner Midwife cadre to promote natural childbirth.

Obesity & NCDs

- **Fiscal Deterrents** - Impose higher GST on ultra-processed foods to curb urban obesity.
- **Mandatory FOPL** - Fast-track FSSAI's Front-of-Pack labeling warnings.
- **Strengthen HWCs** - Equip ASHAs with digital tools for early diabetes and hypertension surveillance.

Child Nutrition

- **Targeted Feeding** - Use POSHAN 2.0 to distribute regional, millet-based infant fortifiers.
- **Leverage U-WIN** - Digitally track and micro-target areas with high child wasting.

Data Deficits

- **Restore Anemia Testing** - Re-integrate objective blood-drawn testing into national baselines.
- **Regional Appraisals** - Conduct specialized surveys for left-out, conflict-hit pockets.

References

1. NFHS | NFHS-6
2. The Hindu | NFHS-6
3. The Indian Express | NFHS-6

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