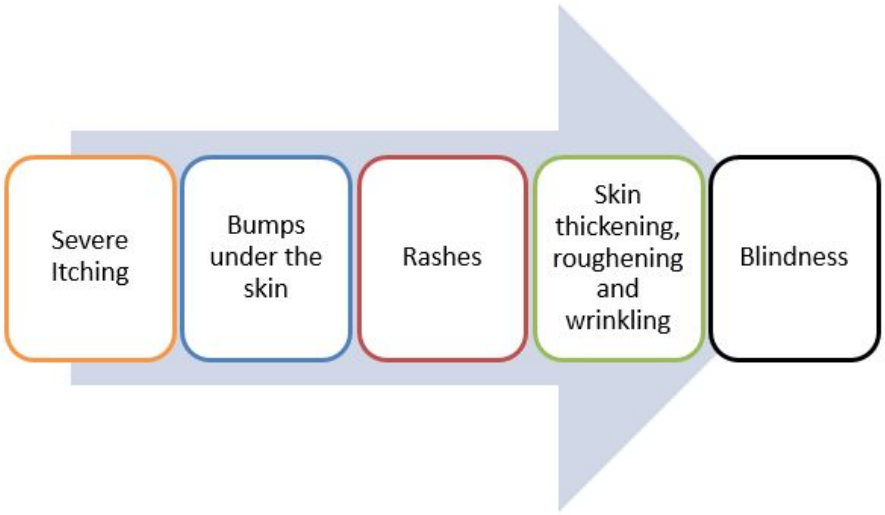
Onchocerciasis

Why in News?

WHO verifies Niger as the 1st country in the African Region to eliminate Onchocerciasis.

- Onchocerciasis, also known as river blindness, is a parasitic disease that affects the ***skin and eyes.***
- **Caused by -** Microscopic worm ***Onchocerca volvulus.***
- **Symptoms**



- **Transmission -** Transmitted to humans by the bites of infected black flies (Genus - Simulium) that breed in fast-flowing rivers.
- **Vulnerable** - More common in people who work in agriculture, especially those who live near rivers.
- Early exposure to *O. volvulus* infection is associated with epilepsy in children.
- **Prone countries** - Primarily affects rural populations in sub-Saharan Africa, and Yemen, with smaller endemic areas foci found in parts of Latin America.
- **Prevention** - Onchocerciasis was brought under control in West Africa through the work of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme (OCP).
- This was later supplemented by large-scale distribution of ivermectin since 1989.
- The African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) was launched in 1995 with the objective of controlling onchocerciasis in the remaining endemic countries in Africa.
- It is closed at the end of 2015 after beginning the transition to onchocerciasis elimination.
- **Treatment -** Population-based treatment with ***Ivermectin*** is the current core strategy to eliminate onchocerciasis, with a minimum requirement of 80% therapeutic coverage.
- Ivermectin is donated by Merck under the brand name of Mectizan.
- **Global status -** More than 99% of infected people live in Africa and Yemen, the remaining 1% live on the border between Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).
- In 2023 at least 249.5 million people required preventive treatment against onchocerciasis.
- **Onchocerciasis free countries -** Five countries have been verified by WHO as free of onchocerciasis after successfully implementing elimination activities for decades.

- 4 in the region of the Americas - Colombia (2013), Ecuador (2014), Mexico (2015) and Guatemala (2016), and
- 1 in Africa - Niger (2025).

Reference

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