Raccoon roundworm

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance*

Why in News?

A dangerous raccoon roundworm is spreading across Europe, causing severe brain damage and blindness in rare human cases.

- Raccoon roundworm is a ***parasitic nematode (roundworm)*** primarily found in raccoons, but it can infect humans and other animals.

  Raccoons are adaptable omnivorous mammal's native to North America, recognised for their masked face and role as hosts for certain zoonotic parasites.

- **Scientific Name** - Baylisascaris procyonis.
- This parasite starts life in raccoon intestines, where adult worms pump out millions of eggs that end up in faeces.
- **Transmission -** Those eggs toughen up in soil for weeks, surviving for years and waiting for an unlucky host to swallow them, perhaps through dirty hands or contaminated water.
- **Symptoms in humans -** The larvae hatch and wander, burrowing into tissues, eyes, or worst of all, the brain.
- Symptoms can mimic other illnesses like nausea, fatigue, even blindness or fatal brain damage.
- **Vulnerables** - Children, who love playing in dirt, face the biggest risk.
- **Global Spread –** Raccoons are native to North America and only pop up here as rare smuggling cases or accidental stowaways in shipping containers.
- It has firmly taken hold in wild raccoons across 9 countries, with Germany at the epicentre.
- Infection rates as high as 77% in some regions, and urban raccoons are bringing the parasite closer to people than ever before.
- Europe has already seen 3 confirmed cases leading to permanent vision

loss.

India *has no wild raccoons as of now.*

Reference

India Today | Raccoon roundworm

