Shigellosis

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Health*

Why in News?

An outbreak of shigellosis, or shigella infection, has been reported in Kerala, with one death and 15 cases across the State this month.

- **Shigellosis** – It is a *highly contagious intestinal infection* that causes acute diarrhoea.
- **Caused by the** – Shigella bacteria, one of the leading bacterial causes of diarrhoea worldwide.
- Humans are the only natural reservoir of the Shigella bacteria.
- **Transmission** – It is transmitted through *direct, close contact* with infected individuals, through the faecal-oral route and through *sexual contact*.
- It can also spread through *contaminated food and water* or contact with faeces of an infected person, for instance, while changing a diaper.
- **Risk factors**
  - Children under the age of five,
  - having a weakened immune system,
  - travelling to an area with unsafe food or water,
  - living in crowded areas or in long-term care facilities or group settings/homes and experiencing homelessness.
- **Symptoms**
  - **Incubation period** – Generally 1–4 days
  - **Common symptoms** – Diarrhoea, which can be bloody or with mucus, lasting 3 days or more.
  - **Other symptoms** – Includes stomach cramps, vomiting, fever, tenesmus (feeling of needing to pass stool even when bowels are empty)
  - Symptoms usually last for five to seven days.
- **Global Status** – The estimated annual incidence of shigellosis is 188 million cases & approximately 164,000 cases result in death, a significant number of these *being children under five.*
- **Treatment**
  - **Mild cases** – It is typically self-limiting (means symptoms resolve themselves), supportive care at home (hydration, rest, ORS for children)
  - **Severe cases** – Diagnosis would involve a physical examination and testing of stool samples to check for the infection.
- Medicines, including antibiotics, may be prescribed for a serious infection.
- **No Vaccine** – There is currently *no approved vaccine* for shigellosis, though several

candidates are undergoing clinical trials.

- **Important** – It is important to consult a doctor before taking any medicine, as some diarrhoea medicines are not recommended for a shigella infection and for children.
- **Complications** – Dehydration is one major complication, especially with children, and in severe loss of fluids can be dangerous, even leading to death.
- Some children may experience seizures, though it is unclear if it is the infection or the fever that causes the seizures.
- **Less common complications** – Include the infection entering the bloodstream, reactive arthritis (inflammation of the joints), rectal prolapse, and haemolytic uremic syndrome.

Reference

The Hindu | Shigellosis

