Vaccination Gap

Mains Syllabus: GS II - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Why in the News?

Recent Lancet study revealed that there are 1.44 million children with zero dose of vaccination in India.

What is the status of vaccination gap?

- **Early Efforts** - The world has made unprecedented progress in vaccinating children against life-threatening disease since World Health Organisation (WHO) established the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in 1974.
- Over the past 50 years, EPI has vaccinated more than 4 billion children, preventing the deaths of an estimated 154 million children worldwide and providing a total of 10.2 billion years of full health.
- **Decline in Vaccination Momentum** - Despite significant progress in expanding vaccine coverage between 1980 and 2023, the momentum has significantly faltered since 2010.
- **Stagnation in Worldwide Immunisation** – By 2023, an estimated 15.7 million children globally had received no doses of the diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP) vaccine in their first year of life.
- The study was reported in the Global Burden of Disease Study Vaccine Coverage Collaborators, published in the Lancet.
- **Hotspot Countries** - More than half of these 15.7 million unvaccinated children reside in just eight countries, with Nigeria largest and India the 2nd largest.
- **Vaccination Gap in India** – India had a 1.44 million children classified as "zero-dose" in 2023 out of the 15.7 million.
- South Asia Concentration - This region account for a substantial 13% of these vulnerable children, emphasising the concentrated nature of this crisis within the subcontinent.
- **Decline in Measles Coverage** – It has declined in 100 of 204 countries between 2010 and 2019.
- **Drop in High Income Countries** - 21 of 36 high-income countries experienced declines in coverage for at least one vaccine dose against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles, polio, or tuberculosis

What are causes of increase in vaccination gap?

- **COVID-19 Pandemic** - It severely exacerbated existing challenges, leading to sharp

declines in global vaccine coverage rates from 2020 onwards.

- **Persistent Global Inequalities** – Low income countries , most of the African countries, island countries are at disadvantaged position in receiving vaccinations.
- **Growth of Vaccine Misinformation** - The recent measles outbreak in the United States, a nation with advanced healthcare infrastructure, underscores the consequences of vaccine hesitancy due to misinformation.
- **Regional Armed Conflicts** – The Israel-Palestine conflict in West Asia, Ukraine-Russia conflict and the consequent political instability have affected the vaccination program in those regions.
- **Decline in International Aid** - In 2025, aid cuts by the US, along with reductions by other nations have affected the vaccination efforts in under developed countries.

What are the impacts of the vaccination gap?

- **Health Impact** - Stagnation in worldwide immunisation efforts, leaving millions of vulnerable children, particularly in India and other South Asian nations, susceptible to deadly, preventable diseases.
- **Disease Outbreak** - These trends increase the risk of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles, polio, and diphtheria.
- **Hampers Achieving Global Immunization Target** – The current level of vaccination gap will affect in achieving the global immunisation targets for 2030.
- **Increase in Treatment Cost** – Outbreak of vaccine preventable disease will cause hospitalization and increase the treatment cost.
- **Affects Human Resource Development** – The consequent morbidities will affect the educational and skill development capabilities of people.

What needs to be done?

- There is a critical need for targeted improvements to ensure that all children can benefit from lifesaving immunisations.
- Routine childhood vaccinations are among the most powerful and cost-effective public health interventions available.
- Prioritizing trust-building, engaging community leaders, and tailoring interventions with more culturally appropriate local strategies to combat vaccine misinformation and to improve vaccine confidence and uptake.
- Sustained investment and targeted strategies will be essential to maintain progress, close immunisation gaps, and ensure equitable access to life-saving vaccines.
- For a country as diverse as India, a highly localised and culturally sensitive vaccination programmes is needed to address the gaps.

Vaccination Coverage Status in India

• Until 2023, 12 phases of Mission Indradhanush (MI) or Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI have been conducted where 5.46 crore children and 1.32 crore pregnant women have been vaccinated.
• As a percentage, zero dose or unvaccinated children account for 0.11 per cent of the country's total population.
• There has been a commensurate decrease in drop-out percentages from DTP-1 to DTP-3 from 7 % in 2013 to 2% in 2023.
• Measles coverage is increased from 83 % in 2013 to 93% in 2023.
• The number of unvaccinated children has dropped from 26 lakh zero dose children in 2013 to 16 lakh zero dose children in 2023.
• The vaccination coverage of over 90 per cent for most antigens covered under the programme is also at par with many high-income countries.
• India's 83.46 per cent exceeds the global vaccine coverage average (72.77 pc) for WHO recommended vaccines.
• India has been maintaining its polio free status since 2014 onwards.

Vaccination Initiatives in India

• **Mission Indradhanush (MI)** – It is a focused immunization drive in India, launched in December 2014, to increase full immunization coverage for children under two years of age and pregnant women.
• **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)** – It is a focused, time-bound initiative to rapidly increase routine immunization coverage, particularly for children and pregnant women who have been missed or left out of the standard vaccination program.
• The goal is to achieve high immunization coverage, aiming for over 90% full immunization in targeted areas.
• **Zero Dose Implementation Plan 2024** – It has been developed for 143 districts in 11 States in India that have a high number of unvaccinated children
• **Special Campaigns** - National Immunisation days (NIDs) and Sub National Immunisation days (SNIDs) for Pulse Polio programme are special vaccination campaigns carried out every year.
• VHND (Village Health and Nutrition Day) on designated days for immunisation activities are hosted.
• State Task Force on Immunisation (STFI), District Task Force on Immunisation (DTFI) and Block Task Force on Immunisation (BTFI) ensure effective implementation of the drives that are regularly undertaken.
• **UWIN Portal** - The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has also developed the UWIN portal for the registration and recording of all vaccination events of children and pregnant women.

References

1. The Hindu | Alarming vaccination gap
2. The Hindu | Zero Dose Implementation Plan 2024

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