

WHO-UNODC report on Contaminated Medicines

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | General science

Why in News?

Recently, the WHO-UNODC released a report revealing that Contaminated medicines killed 1,300 people in last 90 years.

- **Critical findings** - This report provides for persistent and preventable threat of excipients contamination worldwide.

Excipients are inactive substances like tablets used as the vehicle or medium by which to **deliver a drug** or other active substance to patients.

- **WHO Alerts** - Since October 2022, it has issued seven 'Medical Product Alerts' concerning multiple batches of contaminated liquid oral medicines.
 - Marketed for paediatric use and exported widely to low- and middle-income countries.
 - Two alerts concerning falsified bulk chemicals masquerading as pharmaceutical-quality excipients.
- **Issue** - Most of the recent cases involve inexpensive oral liquid medicines that can be bought without a prescription.
- In most cases these are marketed specifically for children and are registered medicines available in pharmacies.

| Usage of harmful drugs in Medicine | | |
|--|---|---|
| Drugs | Uses | Effects |
| Diethylene glycol (DEG), and Ethylene glycol (EG) | Used as industrial solvents and antifreeze agents | Cause severe health issues, and be fatal if ingested, even in small amounts, especially for children. |
| Propylene glycol, Glycerin, and Sorbitol are illegally substituted for pharmaceutical-grade excipients. | Used in the formulation of medicines such as cough syrups and paracetamol syrups. | Cause severe health issues. |

- **Impact**
 - Children are mostly affected by these contaminated drugs.
 - Disproportionately affected people in low and middle-income countries.
- **Contamination aiding factors**
 - **Unregulated production** - Manufacturers of high-risk pharmaceutical grade excipients are not currently subject to regulatory oversight
 - **Unsafe reuse & poor oversight** - Lack of control on recycling or reuse of empty drums of pharmaceutical excipients, resulting in the packaging being passed on to third parties for reuse.

- **Absence of tracking system** - Lack of traceability systems used in relation to high-risk excipients.

- **Recommendation**

- **Addressing systematic weakness** - Strengthening of systemic vulnerabilities in the global supply chain of pharmaceutical excipients.
- **Regulatory reform** - Need for improved regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Improving visibility** - Greater transparency and traceability in the excipient supply chain.
- **Collaborative mechanism** - Stronger association between the health and law enforcement authorities, and the private sector.

United Nation Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC)

- **Started in** - 1997.
- **Headquarters** - Vienna, Austria.
- It works to make the world safer from drugs, crime, terrorism and corruption.
- It works in 150 countries, building networks of cooperation across borders and providing reliable data and analysis.
- It has training judges, police officers and border officials as well as healthcare and social workers to make communities safer and more resilient.

Reference

[The Hindu| WHO-UNODC report on Contaminated Medicines](#)

