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

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