

To receive Daily news juice pdf on your WhatsApp, send name and city through WhatsApp on 75979-00000.

1. WHO Global hepatitis report and findings for India

Why in News?

According to the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) Global Hepatitis Report 2024, India has among the highest burdens of viral hepatitis — tied with tuberculosis (TB) as the second largest infectious killer globally — in the world. Covid-19 was the number one infectious killer, according to the report which used data from 2022.

Globally, an estimated 1.3 million people died of viral hepatitis in 2022 (as compared to 1.1 million in 2019), even as its incidence — number of new cases in a year — went down to 2.2 million in 2022 (as compared to 2.5 million in 2019). Even more concerning is the fact that diagnosis and treatment for viral hepatitis remained extremely low.

What is viral hepatitis?

There are five hepatitis viruses that cause liver disease in humans. Hepatitis A and E are transmitted through contaminated food and water, and result in weeks-long symptoms such as fever, abdominal pain, jaundice (yellowing of skin), dark urine, and pale stools.

The WHO report, however, pertains to the blood-borne hepatitis B (hep B) and hepatitis C (hep C) viruses. Some of these viruses may result in a short-term infections which resolve on their own. But others can lead to chronic life-long disease, cause cirrhosis (permanent scarring of the liver, making it less efficient), and increase the risk of liver cancer.

Hep B can be prevented by vaccination, while hep C can be cured with medication. The report does not consider hepatitis D that can only infect those who are already infected with hep B. It can thus be prevented by vaccinating against hep B.

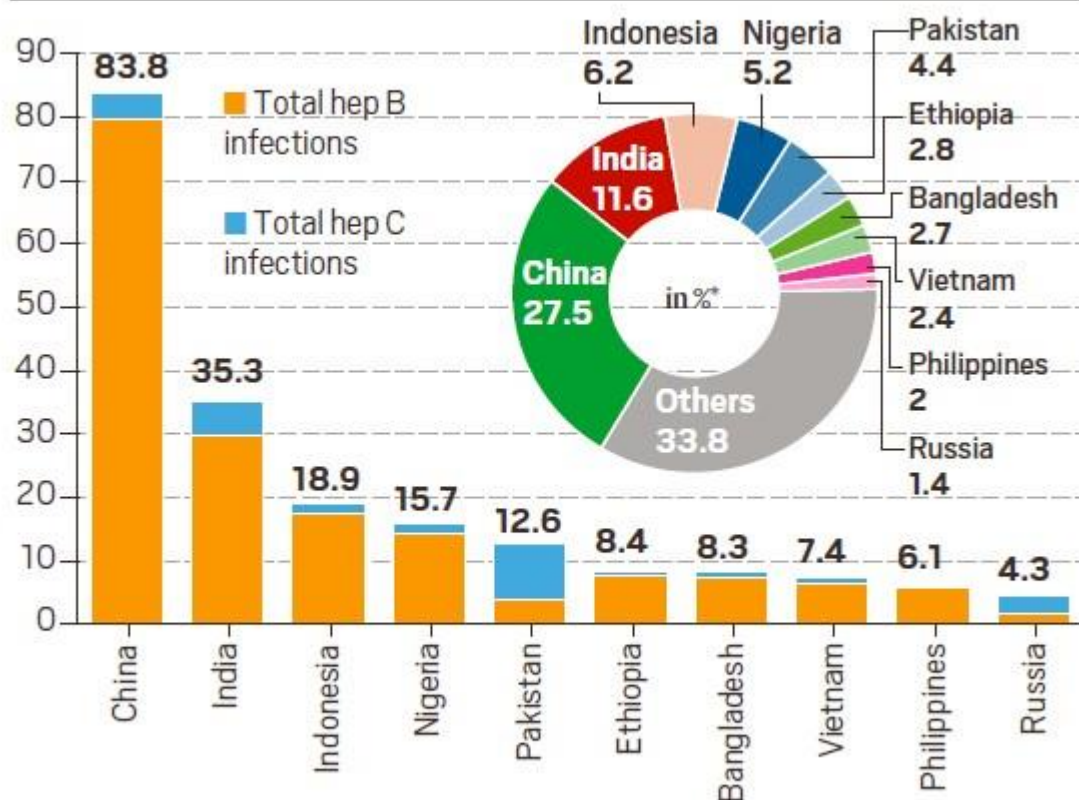
What does the report say about India?

India has the world's second highest prevalence of viral hepatitis cases, accounting for over 11% of the global burden, the report found.

Globally, of the 254 million people living with hep B in 2022, India accounted for 29 million cases, second only to China (79 million cases). Of the 50 million people living with hep C in the world, India accounted for 5.5 million cases, just behind Pakistan's 8.8 million cases. The diagnosis of viral hepatitis also remained abysmally low. According to the report, only 2.4% hep B cases and about 28% hep C cases were diagnosed.

This is despite there existing a national programme that offers free diagnosis and treatment for hep B and C. Though the programme was launched in 2018, its reach remains limited.

10 COUNTRIES BEAR TWO-THIRDS OF GLOBAL BURDEN



Stacked bars represent total hep B + total hep C infections in millions. Figures in pie are country-wise share of total hep B + total hep C infections in the world. Source: WHO's Global Hepatitis Report 2024

What is driving up viral hepatitis cases in India?

Viral hepatitis can be transmitted through contaminated blood transfusions, or through contaminated needles.

India's hep B cases are driven up by mother-to-child transmission. Almost 90% of hep B cases in India are transmitted from mother to child, because most blood banks now provide safe blood, and needle-stick transmission in healthcare workers is limited because almost everyone is vaccinated.

With regard to hep C, the WHO report says that India is one of 10 countries where 80% infections are among injection drug users.

What are the challenges in dealing with viral hepatitis?

There are more challenges to controlling hep B (than C). At least three things have to be ensured. "First, all newborns will have to be fully vaccinated against hep B. Second, adults who have not been immunised should also be given the shot. And all those who are diagnosed with the infection should be put on treatment.

The hep B vaccine was rolled out for children in 2007-08, under the government's universal immunisation programme. But a 2019 study found that its coverage varied between 41% and

62%. The 2018 National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme also makes provisions for vaccination of people at high risk of contracting hep B, such as healthcare workers.

With regard to hep C, just making medicines available is half the battle won. The available treatment can cure hep C, and has a good efficacy of 80% to 90%. Unlike hep B, for which medicines have to be taken for life, the treatment for hep C goes on for a shorter duration [12 to 24 weeks].

How does India's response to viral hepatitis compare with that to TB?

Crucially, despite the infection killing almost as many people as TB, it does not receive nearly as much attention. Globally, treatment coverage for TB was estimated to be around 70% in 2022, but the coverage for hep B and C was only 3% and 20% respectively.

In India, the numbers of deaths due to viral hepatitis aren't comparable to TB, which killed an estimated 3.31 lakh people in 2022, but the disparity in treatment coverage remained stark. The report found that none of the diagnosed patients received treatment for hep B, while just 21% received treatment for hep C. In comparison, 95% of those diagnosed with TB in India were put on therapy.

Shortage of drugs is not the problem. According to the report, India has among the cheapest drugs and diagnostics available. For example, the cost of a rapid diagnostic test for hep B in India, at \$0.09, was the lowest among the countries that reported the figure. Similarly, the cost of a rapid diagnostic test for hep C was only \$0.21 in India, again the lowest among countries that reported the figure.

In India, the TDF treatment for hep B is also available for lower than the global benchmark price of \$ 2.40 per month. Moreover, a 12-week course to cure hep C, for which the global benchmark price is \$60, is available for cheaper in India. In fact, several Indian drug makers manufacture generic versions of these medicines.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science

Source: Indian Express

2. A short history of Iran-Israel ties and why they soured after 1979

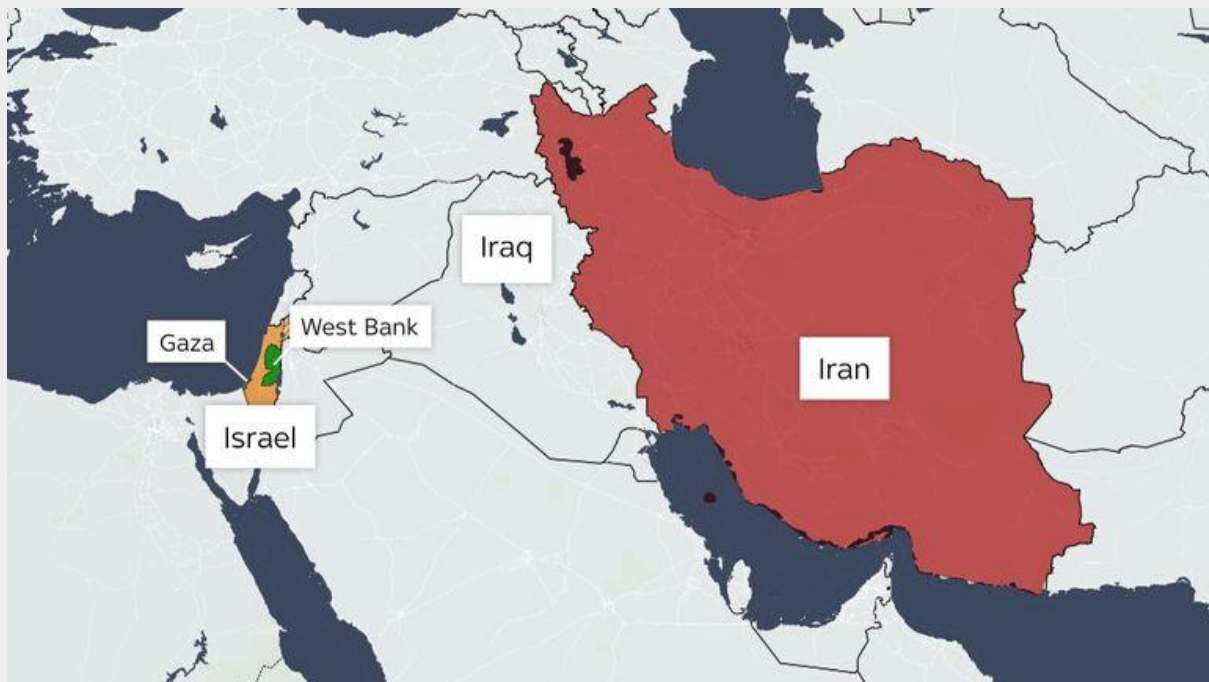
Why in News?

Iran has said that its April 12 attacks on Israel were in response to Israeli war jets targeting an Iranian consulate in Syria earlier this month, leading to the death of its senior military commanders.

While drones and missiles were fired at Israel, no significant casualties have been reported so far. Iran has claimed to have caused damage to one Israeli military facility.

Concerns have been raised ever since the Hamas attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent attacks in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthis, that a wider regional conflict could happen in the Middle East, with the two powers at the centre of it.

However, their relationship has not always been as fraught as it is today. Iran was one of the first countries in the region to recognise Israel after its formation in 1948. It was only after 1979 that their diplomatic ties ended.



Pre-1979 Iran-Israel ties

In 1948, the opposition of Arab states to Israel led to the first Arab-Israeli war. Iran was not a part of that conflict, and after Israel won, it established ties with the Jewish state. It was the second Muslim-majority country to do so after Turkey.

The Pahlavi dynasty, under the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, ruled Iran then. It had US support, as did Israel, and the two countries maintained ties with each other, with Iran also selling oil to Israel amid its economic boycott by Arab states.

The 1979 revolution

A religious state was established in Iran after the Shah was overthrown in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The regime's view of Israel changed, and it was seen as an occupier of Palestinian land.

Israel's Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini termed Israel "Little Satan" and the United States the "Great Satan", seeing the two as parties interfering in the region. Iran also sought to grow its presence in the region, challenging the two major powers Saudi Arabia and Israel – both of whom were US allies.

A Shadow War after 1979

As a result, the ties between the countries worsened. While Israel and Iran have never engaged in direct military confrontation, both have attempted to inflict damage on the other through proxies and limited strategic attacks.

Israel has attacked Iranian nuclear facilities from time to time. In the early 2010s, it targeted several facilities and nuclear scientists in a bid to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. In 2010, the US and Israel are believed to have developed Stuxnet, a malicious computer virus. Used to attack a uranium enrichment facility at Iran's Natanz nuclear site, it was the "first publicly known cyberattack on industrial machinery".

Iran, meanwhile, is seen as responsible for funding and supporting several militant groups in the region that are anti-Israel and anti-US, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

This support was why concerns of a widening conflict or a confrontation have been raised in the last few months. Along with how Iran, its proxies and Israel react in the various situations that have unfolded, a significant factor is the US reaction.

President Joe Biden has been largely supportive of longtime ally Israel's "right to defend" itself, even in the face of global and domestic criticism over the thousands of civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip. With the US presidential elections due this year, he would not want to be seen involving the country in the conflict far away from home, while also keeping its commitments to Israel. The tightrope-walking has, therefore, added to the uncertainty.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations
Source: Indian Express

3. As Iran attacks Israel, four key questions on what is happening, why it matters

1. What's happened so far?

Iran has launched an aerial attack on Israel using "more than 300 threats" including cruise and ballistic missiles, rockets, and explosive drones, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said.

Iran said the attacks were a response to the Israeli air strikes on its diplomatic premises in Damascus, Syria, on April 2, in which 13 people, including a senior Iranian military general, were killed. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had vowed revenge.

2. What kind of damage has Iran's attack on Israel caused?

No significant damage had been reported during the first few hours of the crisis. Israeli air defences, supported by American, British, and Jordanian forces, intercepted the "vast majority" of the missiles and drones above Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, before they could reach Israel, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said.

There is considerable geographical distance between Iran and Israel, which a missile could take between 15 minutes to about 2 hours to traverse, depending on its speed.

The attacks that began on April 13 night were launched, besides Iran, from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, the United States Department of Defence said. Iran maintains a military presence in several conflict-ridden countries in this region, and militias backed, funded, and armed by Iran control territory in these countries.

3. Why is Iran's attack significant?

Although Iran and Israel have a long history of bitter conflict and covert military actions against each other, this is the first time Iran has launched a direct attack of this scale aimed at targets within Israel.

Although Iran has said that following its attacks on Saturday night, “the matter [of the Israeli attack on Iranian premises in Damascus] can be deemed concluded”, the Israeli response remains to be seen.



4. What has the United States said?

President Joe Biden has condemned the attacks by Iran and reaffirmed the United States’ “ironclad commitment” to the security of Israel. Biden said he would convene a meeting of the G7 to “coordinate a united diplomatic response” to Iran’s attack.

The escalation increases Biden’s problems in the Middle East as his re-election battle at home picks up pace. With the war in Gaza continuing, the US has its task cut out.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

PrepMate