



DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

LEADING HEALTH, POPULATION AND FAMILY WELFARE STORIES OF THE DAY
Wednesday 20220608

Public health law

**Stage set for public health law, NITI sends draft to ministry
Draft law proposes to repeal 125-year-old Epidemic Diseases Act (The
Tribune: 20220608)**

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/stage-set-for-public-health-law-niti-sends-draft-to-ministry-401894>

Stage set for public health law, NITI sends draft to ministry

Stage has been set for the enactment of a central law to enable the country to respond effectively to public health emergencies and create a special public health cadre to respond to future challenges.

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The NITI Aayog has shared a draft of the National Public Health Act with the Ministry of Health for further deliberation. The draft law proposes to repeal the 125-year-old Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, which was woefully inadequate in dealing with Covid, causing the government to invoke the National Disaster Management Act to enforce measures like lockdowns.

“In light of the evolving canvas of public health globally and domestically, the need to strengthen public health governance, and implement India’s commitment under various international instruments, it is proposed to enact a central law on public health under Entries 13 and 14 of List of Schedule VII and Article 253 of the Constitution of India,” the NITI draft says.

The law, in a first, defines several unclear terms, including bioterrorism, deratting, decontamination, disaster, public health emergency and others and proposes a national public health authority to guide national response in emergencies.

The authority will in six months formulate a comprehensive written plan for the prevention, tracking, mitigation and control of a “public health emergency” and situations of “outbreak” or “potential outbreak”.

The government, both central and state, will declare a state of public health emergency, a disease or causative agent as notifiable on the authority’s recommendations. Importantly, the draft law envisages wide ranging powers for the national authority, which will have parallel structures at state, district and block levels.

Under the head “Powers of the National and State Public Health Authority”, the draft says, “For the purpose of carrying out inquiry, the authority shall have all powers of a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, in respect of summoning witnesses, production of documents and receiving evidence on affidavit”.

Under the proposed law, declaration of public health emergency will also be tantamount to a ‘disaster’ under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Comprehensive plan in 6 months

The authority will in six months formulate a comprehensive written plan for the prevention, tracking, mitigation and control of “public health emergency” and situations of “outbreak” or “potential outbreak”

The draft law says the central government may fix taxation on activities or products that adversely affect human health or the environment and spend proceeds on public health or sanitation, subject to the advice of the national authority

It mandates “duty to report”, under which pharmacists will need to report any unusual prescription rates

Cancer vanishes

'First time in history': Cancer vanishes for every patient in drug trial; Indian-origin patient among those healed completely

‘Miracle’ drug trial might be an early glimpse of revolutionary treatment shift, says cancer expert (The Tribune:20220608)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/first-time-in-history-cancer-vanishes-for-every-patient-in-drug-trial-indian-origin-patient-among-those-healed-completely-402050>

'First time in history': Cancer vanishes for every patient in drug trial; Indian-origin patient among those healed completely

Photo for representation only.

An Indian-origin patient was among those who had a "miracle" cure using a cancer medication that is being tried out by a research centre here, achieving an unprecedented healing rate when all 14 patients in the trial had their cancers disappear.

"It's a miracle", Nisha Varughese said about the immunotherapy drug's efficacy in curing her.

In the trial at the Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) Cancer Centre in New York using dostarlimab, "the rectal cancer disappeared after immunotherapy -- without the need for the standard treatments of radiation, surgery, or chemotherapy -- and the cancer has not returned in any of the patients, who have been cancer-free for up to two years," the MSK said.

According to researchers, this was the first time that all the patients in a cancer trial were completely healed with a medication and they did not have serious side effects.

The results of the trial were disclosed over the weekend in the New England Journal of Medicine and at a meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

An editorial in the Journal called it "an early glimpse of a revolutionary treatment shift".

MSK explained that "immunotherapy harnesses the body's own immune system as an ally against cancer."

It said, "The Immune cells contain a safeguard called a checkpoint, to prevent them from attacking normal cells. Cancer cells can trip this safeguard and shut down immune cells, allowing a tumour to hide and grow."

Immunotherapy uses what is called a "checkpoint inhibitor" that frees immune cells to recognise and attack cancer cells, she added.

Varughese recalled discovering she was completely cancer-free: "That day I didn't see the tumour. So, I was thinking, where is the tumour? Then, I thought maybe it's hiding somewhere inside. Doctor told me, there is no more tumour. It's a miracle."

Andrea Cercek, a cancer specialist who ran the trial, said, "The immunotherapy shrank the tumours much faster than I expected."

Luis Diaz, who was the other researcher running the trial and is a member of the White House National Cancer Advisory Board, said, "It's really exciting. I think this is a great step forward for patients."

Usually, rectal cancer is treated with chemotherapy, radiation and surgery. But Cercek said, "The most exciting part of this is that every single one of our patients has only needed immunotherapy. We haven't radiated anybody, and we haven't put anybody through surgery."

In the Journal editorial, a cancer expert, Hanna K Sanoff from the University of North Carolina, cautioned, "Whether the results of this small study conducted at the MSK Cancer Centre will be generalisable to a broader population of patients with rectal cancer is not known yet."

"Despite these uncertainties," she added, "Cercek and colleagues and their patients who agreed to forgo the standard treatment for a promising but unknown future with immunotherapy have provided what may be an early glimpse of a revolutionary treatment shift." IANS

Angioplasty

107-year-old woman with 99 pc blockage ‘treated’ with angioplasty in Ahmedabad

According to studies, about 40-50 million people in India suffer from Ischemic Heart Disease – a condition when the arteries are narrowed and less blood and oxygen reach the heart, rendering it weak (The Tribune: 20220608)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/107-year-old-woman-with-99-pc-blockage-treated-with-angioplasty-in-ahmedabad-401855>

107-year-old woman with 99 pc blockage ‘treated’ with angioplasty in Ahmedabad
Photo for representation. — iStock

When 107-year-old Jamnaben (name changed) suffered a heart attack, her family was determined to bring her to Ahmedabad.

They undertook an eight-hour long road journey from their native village in Mandsaur district in Madhya Pradesh and brought her to the Marengo CIMS Hospital where her angiography showed a severe 99 per cent blockage of the arteries.

A frail Jamnaben presented a significant challenge in conducting angioplasty to restore the normal functioning of her heart. But the doctors surmounted the challenge and treated this very elderly patient.

The team was headed by Keyur Parikh, interventional cardiologist and chairman of the hospital, who was assisted by Chintan Sheth, cardiac anaesthesiologist.

In the case of Jamnaben, the challenges were beyond age. The radial interventional procedure needed the patient to be healthy enough for the doctors to find a radial artery in the wrist.

Parikh said, "Age should never be a limitation to healthcare delivery. The average longevity in India is increasing and is almost at par with Japan and Norway positioned at 74 years and 81 years, respectively (in women). With the changing face of healthcare system, our goal is to deliver healthcare to our geriatric patients just like we do to the younger patients."

The family expressed gratitude, saying: "We want our great-grandmother to live many more years. Since the day our grandfather was treated at this hospital for the same procedure, we were sure that our great-grandmother will also recover fast."

According to studies, about 40-50 million people in India suffer from Ischemic Heart Disease (IHD) and nearly 15-20 per cent deaths are caused by IHD -- a condition when the arteries are narrowed and less blood and oxygen reach the heart, rendering it weak. This ultimately results in heart attack. IANS

Covid precautions

No need to panic, but don't be careless too (The Tribune: 20220608)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/editorials/covid-precautions-401895>

The sudden surge in coronavirus cases in parts of the country during the past few days has led to increased monitoring and advisories being put out to be on alert, but a key difference this time round that should come as a relief is the low severity of the disease. Majority of those testing positive are reporting mild symptoms with very few instances of hospitalisation, lending a degree of reassurance in the general outlook. That should not lead to disregarding calls by public health experts to go back to observing safety protocols and ramping up health facilities as a preparatory step, with a focus on accelerating genome sequencing of all samples to identify any stronger variant that could be the cause behind new infections.

Many infected patients going unreported because of low testing is a possibility, but even in Maharashtra, which is seeing a sharp spike in cases, measured precautionary steps are being announced to ensure there is no disruption in normal activities. That is the right approach, not a panic reaction or imposing harsh restrictions. Even if it keeps changing form, the virus will continue to be a part of our environment. Omicron and its sub-variants can re-infect any vaccinated person and taking chances is ill-advised. What also needs to be stressed is to avoid being casual and careless about anyone falling sick and seek immediate medical assistance. People with low immunity have to be protected and transmission curtailed. It would be prudent for those in the high-risk category, especially, to avoid crowded places, wear masks and maintain hand hygiene.

The Centre's advice for adopting a risk-assessment strategy on the public health responses lays stress on a critical component: devise policies in such a manner so as not to lose the gains made so far in the fight against the pandemic. That is best done by adhering to simple Covid protocols that had become accepted behaviour not so long ago.

Covid (The Asian Age: 20220608)

<http://onlinepaper.asianage.com/article/detailpage.aspx?id=16416874>

Covid: Don't drop the guard

Several states have of late reported a spike in the number of new Covid-19 cases, which could possibly trigger the scare of a fourth wave of the pandemic. As in the earlier waves, Maharashtra and its capital Mumbai, national capital Delhi and the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have all reported a sharp increase in the test positivity rate as well as the number of daily caseload. Mumbai alone accounts for more than 1,000 of 4,000-odd new case being reported these days.

The timing of the sharp rise as it comes at a time when schools in most states are reopening offers a serious challenge to the governments. Most educational institutions, especially schools, were shut most of the days in the last two years, robbing a good share of students the idea of the life on campus. Reports on online classes make it evident that despite our claims of technological advancements, a considerable number students had no access to the tools and connectivity and had practically lost education for two years. The socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society were the most affected by the pandemic.

While the government ensures that vaccination programme is on course and continuously monitors the healthcare infrastructure in the country, it should make a realistic assessment of our ability to reach out to the students should the schools be closed again. A total shut down of the economy is an unlikely possibility but education institutions, by their very nature, can make themselves Covid clusters and may be the first in the line to shut the doors. Last mile connectivity is still an issue in India, especially in rural areas while access to technological tools poses a challenge in urban and rural areas alike. The government must have a game plan on how to address them, should things come to such a pass.

Cancer

Some cancer patients can skip treatments, 2 studies show

Researchers are looking for ways to precisely predict which cancer patients can avoid unneeded treatment to cut down on harmful side effects and unnecessary costs. (Indian Express:20220608)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/cancer-patients-skip-treatments-7958453/>

A study suggests some low-risk breast cancer patients can omit radiation after a lumpectomy. (Representative image/Getty)

After surgery, some cancer patients can safely skip radiation or chemotherapy, according to two studies exploring shorter, gentler cancer care.

Researchers are looking for ways to precisely predict which cancer patients can avoid unneeded treatment to cut down on harmful side effects and unnecessary costs.

One new study used a blood test to determine which colon cancer patients could skip chemotherapy after surgery. Another suggests some low-risk breast cancer patients can omit radiation after a lumpectomy.

Must Read | ‘Astonishing’ result in drug trial: First time, cancer vanishes in every patient
The research was discussed at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, which wrapped up Tuesday in Chicago. The colon cancer study, funded by the Australian and U.S. governments and nonprofit groups, was published Saturday by the New England Journal of Medicine.

The findings could allow doctors to “focus on the patients we think would truly benefit from chemotherapy and avoid the side effects for patients for whom it’s likely unnecessary,” said Dr. Stacey Cohen of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, who reviewed the colon cancer findings and was not involved in the research.

COLON CANCER

Many colon cancer patients are given chemotherapy after surgery, even though they may be cured. The drugs can come with side effects such as nausea, anemia, and memory problems.

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But pinpointing which patients might not need further treatment has been tricky. Scientists studied whether a blood test could help doctors make the call.

The study involved 455 patients who had surgery because cancer had spread into the colon wall. After surgery, one group received a blood test, customized to their tumor’s genetic profile, to detect any remaining bits of cancer DNA.

Their care was guided by the blood test: If it showed no signs of remaining cancer, the patients did not get chemotherapy. Meanwhile, doctors made chemo decisions for the rest of the patients in the usual way, guided by analysis of the tumor and nearby tissue.

Also Read | Watch your child for addiction; it can cause cancer

Fewer patients in the blood test group got chemo- 15% vs. 28%. But about 93% of both groups were still free of cancer after two years. In other words, the blood test group fared equally well with less chemotherapy.

“In patients where cancer DNA is not detected after surgery, the chance of cancer relapse is very low, suggesting that chemotherapy is very unlikely to benefit these patients,” said Dr. Jeanne Tie of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, Australia, who led the research.

Skipping chemo makes “a big difference in a person’s quality of life if that can be done without having to put them in jeopardy for recurrence,” said ASCO president Dr. Everett Vokes, who specializes in head and neck and lung cancer at the University of Chicago Medicine.

BREAST CANCER

The other study followed 500 older women with a common form of early-stage breast cancer and low levels of a protein known as Ki67, a marker for fast-growing cancer.

After surgery, the women took hormone-blocking pills, a standard treatment for this type of cancer, but they did not get radiation treatment.

After five years, 10 of the women saw cancer return in the same breast, and there was one breast cancer death. There was no comparison group, but researchers said the results compare favorably to historical data for similar patients who had radiation.

“We estimate the benefits of radiation would be very small in this population compared to the side effects,” said Dr. Timothy Whelan of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, who led the study, which was supported by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the Canadian Cancer Society.

Radiation can cause skin problems, fatigue, and, less commonly, long-term heart problems and second cancers.

Ghee

Cow ghee or buffalo ghee: Which is healthier?

Some experts also suggest consuming ghee on an empty stomach in the morning. (Indian Express:20220608)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/cow-ghee-vs-buffalo-ghee-better-benefits-7948554/>

gheeKnow your ghee (Source: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

Ghee is said to be extremely good for health, if consumed in the right quantity. Which is why experts suggest adding it to one’s diet, and even consume it on an empty stomach. But with many types of ghee available in the market, how do you ensure to pick the healthier variety?

Worry not, as here’s a ready reckoner by nutritionist Suman.

ALSO READ |Why you must begin your day with a teaspoon of ghee on an empty stomach

“Rich in nutrients: Cow ghee is a rich source of vitamin A, D, E and K that are important in ensuring normal cellular function and growth in humans. It also contains a wide range of antioxidants that prevents free radical damage in our bodies — a major cause of cardiac ailments and specific types of cancer,” said the expert as she listed down the differences between cow and buffalo ghee.

Covid-19

Covid-19 may increase risk of psychiatric disorder in months after infection: Study

Researchers at the Oregon State University (OSU) in the US found that Covid-19 patients had about 25 percent increased risk of developing a psychiatric disorder in the four months following their infection, compared with people who had other types of respiratory tract infections. . (Indian Express:20220608)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/covid-19-increase-psychiatric-disorder-7958242/>

Covid-19 may increase risk of psychiatric disorder, says a US study. (Representational/ File Photo)

Covid-19 may increase the risk of developing a psychiatric disorder in the months after infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, according to a study conducted in the US.

Researchers at the Oregon State University (OSU) in the US found that Covid-19 patients had about 25 percent increased risk of developing a psychiatric disorder in the four months following their infection, compared with people who had other types of respiratory tract infections.

The finding, published in the journal World Psychiatry, supports previous research on psychiatric disorders among post-Covid patients, though the current study found a smaller effect than the earlier studies.

Covid-19 News |liveFollow live updates here

The study used data from the National Covid Cohort Collaborative (N3C) to match 46,610 Covid-19 positive individuals with control patients who were diagnosed with a different respiratory tract infection so they could compare how Covid-19 specifically affected patients' mental health.

Alzheimer's.

New study holds out hope for Alzheimer's. (Indian Express:20220608)

The Stanford-led research has found that two rare missense variants -- V236E in APOE3 and R251G in APOE4 -- substantially reduced the risk of the disease by more than 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/alzheimers-research-stanford-study-7958144/>

The fight to counteract Alzheimer's Disease (AD) just got closer to delaying the onset of confusion and cognitive decline in patients. A large-scale genetic association study, which identified and analysed rare missense variants on a protein, indicative of an individual's predisposition to AD, has found that a rare mutation changes the protein structure to grant protection against the disease.

The Stanford-led study, published in the monthly JAMA Neurology journal on May 31, analysed datasets comprising 544,384 participants. Meta-analysis was conducted through multiple studies, including 67,896 individuals with AD, 28,484 individuals with proxy-AD, and 340,306 healthy controls.

Existing research on the correlation of Alzheimer's disease with genetic mutations has established the role of apolipoprotein E — a key protein linked to the pathogenesis of AD. The study has now found that two rare missense variants — V236E in APOE3 and R251G in APOE4 — substantially reduced the risk of AD by more than 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively.

Don't miss |An early warning system for Alzheimer's?

Notably, in a proof of principle study in March 2014, comprising nearly 9,100 subjects (control and test group combined), it was established that the V236E missense variant was “significantly associated with a markedly decreased risk” of a late onset of AD, independent of the presence of APOE2, APOE3 or APOE4.

However, the protective effect of R251G is a new development in the field and further studies can lead to a better understanding of the pathology of the disease as well as drug development.

What are missense mutations?

Mutations can be of various types — missense, nonsense, insertion, deletion, frameshift, or duplication — effectively changing the way proteins are synthesised and altering functions at times, depending on the type of mutation.

Pregnancy

Experts see spike in premature ovarian failure in women below 40; share causes, treatments

Irregular or absence of menses, inability to become pregnant, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, irritation, and night sweats are some of the red flags, said Dr Nisha Pansare, fertility consultant. (Indian Express:20220608)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/premature-ovarian-failure-rise-women-below-40-experts-say-infertility-7932936/>

fertility treatment, infertility, fertility checkup, health, parenting, indian express news Infertility is defined as failure to achieve pregnancy after one year of trying without the use of contraception. (Source: Getty/Thinkstock)

Experts have noticed a spike in the number of women in the age group 25-30 years suffering from premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) or premature ovarian failure (POF), “a common cause of infertility in women below 40”, they say. According to doctors, it is a condition when the ovaries stop functioning normally leading to reduced fertility or even or irregular menstrual cycle.

“Women with POI cannot produce estrogen and progesterone hormones or release eggs, which can cause infertility. Some red flags are irregular or absence of menses, inability to become pregnant, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, irritation, and night sweats. Seven to eight out of 40 patients every week come with premature ovarian failure,” shared Dr Nisha Pansare, fertility consultant, Nova IVF Fertility, Pune.

Causes

Genetic disorders like fragile X syndrome, cancer treatments like chemotherapy or radiation therapy, viral infections, and autoimmune diseases are the causes behind this condition. Age, family history, and previous ovarian surgery are some other risk factors linked to this condition. “We have seen around 3-4 cases and the age group would be around 25 to 30 years. While we wouldn’t say the numbers have gone considerably up, but it is surely becoming a common issue in women,” said Dr Preethika Shetty, consultant obstetrician and gynecologist, Motherhood Hospitals, Kharadi.

Treatment for infertility has evolved with time. (Photo: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

Diagnosis

Woman’s history and certain blood hormone tests (follicle-stimulating hormone [FSH], estrogen, and antimüllerian (AMH levels) are taken into consideration to diagnose this condition. “Chromosomal analysis and Fragile X syndrome mutation (FMR1) should be done to check for genetic causes of this condition,” said Dr Shetty.

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Treatment

POI raises the risk of infertility in women. Low levels of estrogen can also lead to depression, stress, heart problems, and anxiety, added Dr Shetty.

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Dr Pansare recommended visiting an expert if you have a missed period, thyroid problem, family history, or are undergoing cancer treatment. “Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) consisting of estrogen and progesterone is used to treat menopausal symptoms. Women who want to get pregnant and are unable to conceive due to infertility can go for donor eggs or IVF treatment. In the longer term, the loss of ovarian hormones, mainly estrogens invites osteoporosis. So, eat a well-balanced diet, take calcium and vitamin supplements and exercise daily to stay healthy,” she said.

Novavax COVID-19 vaccine

Novavax COVID-19 vaccine backed for authorisation by U.S. FDA panel. (The Hindu:20220608)

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/novavax-covid-19-vaccine-backed-for-authorisation-by-us-fda-panel/article65506362.ece>

Novavax filed for U.S. authorisation in late January, almost a year behind its original plan, following development and manufacturing problems

Advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on June 7 voted overwhelmingly to recommend that the agency authorise Novavax Inc's COVID-19 vaccine for use in adults, which the drugmaker hopes can become the shot of choice among some American vaccine sceptics.

The panel of outside vaccine experts voted 21-0 with one abstention in favour of the vaccine for those 18 and older.

Drugs for cough, cold, pain under over-the-counter category.

Centre plans to bring 16 common drugs for cough, cold, pain under over-the-counter category. (The Hindu:20220608)

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/centre-plans-to-bring-16-common-drugs-for-cough-cold-pain-under-over-the-counter-category/article65504464.ece>

A gazette notification seeking suggestions from stakeholders within a month over the matter has been issued by the ministry

Commonly used drugs for cough, cold, pain and skin irritation such as paracetamol, nasal decongestants and antifungals may soon be available without prescription as the Centre plans to list them under the over-the-counter (OTC) category.

The Union Health Ministry has suggested amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945, to bring 16 such medicines under Schedule K for providing exemptions from requiring a doctor's prescription so that they can be sold over-the-counter by retail sellers under a valid license.

Medical trial

Medical trial shows rare result as cancer vanishes in all patients. (The Hindu :20220608)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/medical-trial-shows-rare-result-as-cancer-vanishes-in-all-patients/article65504496.ece>

12 rectal cancer patients were completely healed of the disease and none of the participants in the medical trial showed severe side effects as well

In a surprising result for an ongoing medical trial, 12 rectal cancer patients were completely healed of the disease after taking a drug for six months. The patients underwent a series of medical exams — physical exam, endoscopy, bioscopy, PET scans, and MRI scans — and none of the reports showed any signs of the tumour.

The findings were published in a paper in the New England Journal of Medicine. The paper lists the names of 32 authors.