Covid-19 and India

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This article is based on **"Smart-locking India"** and **"Virus, on balance: Dealing with coronavirus requires a clear public health focus while addressing individual fears".** It talks about challenges and possible solutions pertaining to the spread of Covid-19 in India.

Recently, the **World Health Organization** (WHO) characterised **Covid-19** as a pandemic. The global death toll due to Covid-19 has crossed the 5,300 mark, with over 1.42 lakh people infected and rapidly it has transitioned across different geographies of the world, from Asia to Europe.

Though India has done well in containing the spread of the virus, the vulnerability that India faces is still high. As currently, nearly more than 100 cases have been reported all across India.

What are the challenges faced by India?

Covid-19 is spread via **airborne droplets (sneeze or cough) or contact with the surface.** It is possible that a person can get Covid-19 by touching a surface or an object that has the virus on it and then touching their own nose, eyes or mouth.

- **Large Population:** India is highly vulnerable due to the **large population constantly travelling and working** in urban agglomerations like Delhi-NCR, Mumbai.
- **Poor Public Hygiene:** Public hygiene in India is poor despite the "Swachh Bharat (Clean India)" movements.
    - As many people spit and sneeze openly on the road.
    - Also, mobile phones, or keyboards, a virtual extension of hands are some of the **dirtiest reservoirs of viruses.**

- **Unknown Incubation Period:** The incubation period (interval between being infected and showing symptoms) is not very accurate. Hence, it can't be defined how long people should be quarantined.
    - Covid-19 usually follows what is known as a **biphasic or dual-phase infection.**
    - It means the virus persists and causes a different set of symptoms than observed in the initial bout. Also, sometimes, the recovered person can relapse.
- **Super Spreader Disease:** Currently, the cases and clusters in India are simple spreaders which means an infected person with normal infectivity. But Covid 19 can also have a **"super spreader",** which means an infected person with high infectivity who can infect hundreds in no time.
- **Rumours on Social Media:** As we grapple with the global Covid 19 anxiety and fear, unfortunately, people tend to rely on **social media platforms** where rumours spread faster than the virus.
- The **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),** said the virus outbreak could cost the global economy up to $2-trillion this year and that the pandemic could cause a recession in some countries causing global economic growth to clock in below 2.5%.
    > The Indian government is facing the twin challenge of containing the virus when the economy is already in the slowdown.

Steps to be taken by India

The ideal approach in dealing with such epidemics must have a clear public health focus while addressing fears at the individual level.

- The public health response to such outbreaks comprises three phases: The containment phase, delay phase and mitigation phase.
    - **The containment phase:** The aim is to detect and isolate cases and trace people who have been in contact with those infected. In this regard, there is an urgent need to clamp down on all major cities and towns, in all aspects, from travel to mass gatherings to schools, colleges and workplaces.
    - **The delay phase:** Delay is largely engineered through **social distancing strategies** and personal protection measures. These are the main tools to prevent accelerated transmission when no vaccine is available. This includes school closures, encouraging more home working and avoiding contacts like handshakes.
    - **The mitigation phase:** The focus will be on providing optimal care for people who need hospitalisation and ensuring support for those who become infected but do not require hospital treatment. It also involves plans to minimise the impact of the disease on society, public services and the economy.

- Addressing fears at the individual level.
    - There is a need for good reporting standards, the media should abide by the ethical framework of journalism.
    - The ICMR has advised the government to go into partial shutdown for implementing partial lockdown (restricting the travel from the countries that have reported the major number of infections).
- In order to deal with future epidemics, there is a need for a coordinated strategy between union and state governments.

    In this pursuit, the subject of 'health' can be transferred to the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution from the State List.

Drishti Mains Question

The ideal approach for India to deal with a pandemic like Covid-19 is to have a clear public health focus while addressing fears at the individual level. Discuss.