

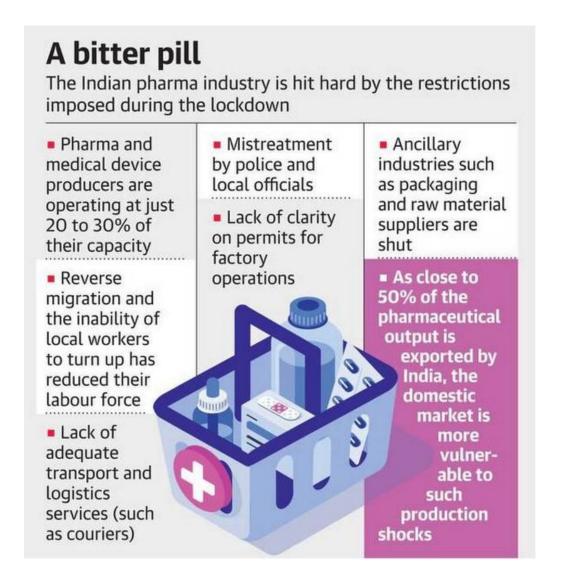
Warning on Scarcity of Drugs and Medical Devices

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Why in News

Recently, the **Department of Pharmaceuticals** has warned of a nationwide **shortage of medicines and medical devices.**

- It has urged the **Ministry of Home Affairs** to take **immediate steps to help** the drug makers resume production under the current **lockdown**.
- The **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority** (NPPA) had also written to all State Chief Secretaries on the problems faced by the pharma firms.



Key Points

- The Department of Pharmaceuticals under the **Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers** is **entrusted with ensuring the seamless production and distribution** of critical life-saving medicines in the wake of the lockdown to contain the **Covid-19** pandemic.
- On an average, drug and medical device makers are functioning at only 20%-30% of their full capacity during the lockdown.
- Production units engaged in making essential commodities, including medicines, vaccines, masks and their ancillaries have been exempted from the restrictions imposed as per the national lockdown.
- If the production will not reach the **pre-lockdown level** soon, it would lead to shortages of medicines and medical devices in the coming weeks.
- Both in the **public and private** sector, the **seamless functioning** of pharma manufacturing and distribution units is **crucial** in dealing with the crisis.
- A **helpline** has been created for **pharma producers' operational complaints**, which are also being referred to State Drug Controllers for suitable intervention.

Challenges

- **Export** of Indian pharmaceuticals offer a **better price in global markets** which can lead to **disproportionate shortages in the domestic market.**
- Restrictions on mobility and production in several states.
- Unavailability of labour, transport and courier services.
 - Reverse migration (from cities to sub-urban/rural areas) of labour and local workers.
 - Lack of public transport options and the fear of police action.
 - Drivers have left their trucks on highways fearing stoppage of vehicles on State,
 district and city borders and lack of food and diesel on the route.
- **Closure of ancillary industries** which are not being considered essential by few local administrations.

They supply packaging material, excipients (required for tablets and capsules manufacturing), utility consumables like briquettes/gases (required to run boilers) and spare parts.

Suggestions

- Suitable measures are needed to reduce the export and focus more on domestic needs.
- State and district administrations need to be **sensitised** so that they can proactively fulfil the needs of pharma units to function fully.
- **Allowance** to the pharma industry to **ferry back their contractual workers** from their native places and **make courier services fully functional** in metro, Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.
- **Drivers with commercial licences** should be **allowed to move** with or without a vehicle by treating it as a 'pass' during the lockdown.
- The apprehensions of the drivers need to be addressed and they also need to be motivated and incentivised.

Source: TH