



## National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)

**For Prelims:** National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), World Health Organisation (WHO), World Health Assembly (WHA), National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA).

**For Mains:** Significance of National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

### Why in News?

Recently, The Union Health Ministry launched the new **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)**, where 384 drugs have been included in this list with addition of 34 drugs, while 26 from the previous list have been dropped.

- As per the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#), Essential Medicines are those that satisfy the priority health care needs of the population.

### DRUGS LIST GETS A REJIG

▶ **Four major anti-cancer drugs** – bendamustine hydrochloride (leukemia), irinotecan HCl trihydrate (pancreatic cancer), lenalidomide (multiple myeloma), and leuprolide acetate (prostate and uterine cancer) – added to NLEM 2022

▶ **Insulin glargine and anti-diabetic drug** teneligliptin also included

▶ **Patented drugs dolutegravir** (anti-HIV), daclatasvir (Hepatitis C), and bedaquiline and delamanid (anti-TB) also part of the list



▶ **Common gastrointestinal drug** ranitidine removed

▶ **Disinfectants like bleaching powder** also taken off the list

### What is the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)?

- About:**
  - The National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) is a list released by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
    - The medicines listed in the NLEM are sold below a price ceiling fixed by the [National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority \(NPPA\)](#).
  - In India, it was framed on the lines of the **Essential Medicines List (EML)** released by the WHO.
- History:**
  - The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** prepared and released the first National List of Essential Medicines of India in 1996 consisting of 279 medicines. This list was

subsequently revised in 2003, 2011, 2015 and 2022.

▪ **Purpose:**

- Guide safe and effective treatment of priority disease conditions of a population.
- Promote the rational use of medicines.
- Optimize the available health resources of a country. It can also be a guiding document for:
  - State governments to prepare their list of essential medicines
  - Procurement and supply of medicines in the public sector.

## What are the Criteria for a Medicine to be Included in NLEM?

- Several factors are looked at before including a drug in the NLEM. These are:
  - **Essentiality:** A medicine may be essential considering the population at large and should fit into the definition mentioned earlier.
  - **Changing disease burden:** With time, the disease burden keeps changing in the country. At one point, TB might be more important to tackle. At the next moment, another disease like Covid-19 may become more important. So, the prevalent disease is considered while preparing the list.
  - **Efficacy and Safety:** The medicine must have "unequivocal" evidence of efficacy and wider acceptance based on its safety to be included in the list.
  - **Cost-Effectiveness:** The total price of the treatment must be considered while including the drug in NLEM. Only unit price may not be the best benchmark for this.
  - **Fixed Dose Combinations (FDCs):** The single-dose medicines are considered for inclusion in NLEM. FDCs are only included if they have a proven advantage concerning the therapeutic effect.
  - **Turnover:** High sales turnover alone is not considered a good benchmark for inclusion in the NLEM. Other factors are also required to be essentially considered for it.

## When is a Medicine Deleted from NLEM?

- A drug is deleted from the list if it gets banned in India. Also, it is removed if reports of concerns about drug safety emerge.
- If medicine with better efficacy or favourable safety profile and better cost-effectiveness is now available, then it is removed from NLEM.

## What is an Essential Medicine List (EML)?

▪ **About:**

- The list is made with consideration of disease **prevalence, efficacy, safety and comparative cost-effectiveness** of the medicines.
- Such medicines should be available in such a way that an individual or community can afford them.
- The WHO EML is updated every two years by the Expert Committee on Selection and Use of Essential Medicines.

▪ **History:**

- The first country in the world to compose its EML was Tanzania in 1970. Then in 1975, the [World Health Assembly \(WHA\)](#) requested WHO to assist member states in selecting and procuring essential medicines, assuring good quality at a reasonable cost.
- Subsequently, the **first WHO model list of essential medicines was published in the year 1977 which contained 186 medicines.**
- It stated that essential medicines were "of **utmost importance, basic, indispensable and necessary for the health and needs of the population**" and the criteria for selection were based on efficacy, safety, quality and total cost.

**Q.** What do you understand by Fixed Dose Drug Combinations (FDCs)? Discuss their merits and demerits. (2013)

**Source:** [IE](#)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/national-list-of-essential-medicines-nlem>

