Syllabus subtopic:

- Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the Coronavirus: its origins; symptoms and measures taken to contain it

News: Deaths from China's new flu-like virus rose to 17 on January 22, heightening global fears of contagion from an infection suspected to have come from animals.

Background

- The previously unknown and contagious coronavirus strain emerged from the central city of Wuhan, with cases now detected as far away as the United States. Officials believe the origin to be a market where wildlife is traded illegally.

- With more than 11 million people, Wuhan is central China's main industrial and commercial centre and an important transport hub, home to the country's largest inland port and gateway to its giant Three Gorges hydroelectric dam.

- The rise in the mobility of the public has objectively increased the risk of the epidemic spreading.

Global health emergency?

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) began an emergency meeting to rule if the outbreak was a global health emergency.

- The virus has spread from Wuhan around China to population centres including Beijing, Shanghai, Macau and Hong Kong. Abroad, Thailand has confirmed four cases, while the United States, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan have each reported one.
The Chinese-ruled gambling hub of Macau confirmed its first case of pneumonia linked to the coronavirus and tightened body-temperature screening measures.

A first case of the virus emerged in Hong Kong on January 22, media reported. The patient arrived via high-speed railway from the mainland and had been quarantined.

New cases may appear as China has stepped up monitoring. But there was no evidence of “super-spreaders” capable of disseminating the virus more widely, as happened during the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak. SARS was thought to have crossed to humans from civet cats sold for food.

Precautions taken worldwide

- Airports round the world have stepped up screening of people from China.
- Russia’s consumer safety watchdog said it had strengthened its sanitary and quarantine control, Britain said it would start enhanced monitoring of passengers arriving from Wuhan and Singapore started screening all passengers arriving from China.
- Mexico said it was investigating a potential case of the virus.
- North Korea banned foreign tourists from January 22 due to the virus, several foreign tour operators said, losing one of its main sources of foreign currency.
- India: Passengers are being screened at airports and no cases have been detected. A travel advisory had been issued and posted on the Health Ministry’s website.

About the Coronavirus

- The coronavirus is a family of viruses that can cause a lot of mild to life-threatening diseases.

- It is the cousin of the more popular Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus.
Mostly these viruses affect animals and do not spread to human beings. However, there are seven strains of this virus that can affect humans.

- The **symptoms** include cough, fever, shortness of breath, and difficulty in breathing. In severe cases, the condition can progress to pneumonia, kidney failure and even death. **For now, there is no vaccine for the new virus.**

- All the six coronaviruses known to humans, including the one that caused severe acute respiratory disease, originated from wild mammals.

- The virus is **constantly adapting and mutating** which makes controlling the outbreak a challenge for the authorities.

- The virus can **spread via human-to-human contact** and can **also spread via respiratory transmission**.