Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the NHM: aim and significance; about neonatal deaths in India and its causes

News: Madhya Pradesh has recorded the highest percentage of newborn deaths of 11.5% against the total admissions to government-run sick newborn care units (SNCUs) in the past three years across the country, a rate ominously spiralling since 2017, according to the National Health Mission (NHM). The country’s average is 7%.

- Although admissions of neonates (under 28 days) in the State have dropped from April 2017 to December 2019 — remaining lower than West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — the percentage of deaths at 12.2% surpassed Bihar’s last year.

- Meanwhile, West Bengal, where 34,344 neonatal deaths occurred in the period, the most in the country, the declining percentage of deaths from 9.2% in 2017 to 8.9% in 2019 coincided with a slump in admissions.

- Madhya Pradesh has also recorded an abysmal sex ratio in admissions — of 663 (number of girls admitted against 1,000 boys) in the three years against the country average of 733, though its sex ratio was 931 as per the 2011 census.

Factors responsible for the spike in the percentage of deaths

1. Staff crunch
2. Low community referrals,
3. Absence of a special neonatal transport service to health centres
4. Reliance on units in cities as last resort and
5. The non-availability of enough units to cater to increasing institutional deliveries

Neonatal deaths in India
According to the Sample Registration System, neonatal deaths in India mainly occur owing to:

1. premature births and low birth weight (35.9%),
2. pneumonia (16.9%),
3. birth asphyxia and birth trauma (9.9%),
4. other non-communicable diseases (7.9%),
5. diarrhoea (6.7%),
6. congenital anomalies (4.6%) and
7. infections (4.2%).

Under the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, each country, including India, has aimed to bring down neonatal mortality to at least 12 per 1,000 live births. In 2018, it stood at 23 for India.

About National Health Mission

The National Health Mission (NHM) was designed with the aim of providing accessible, affordable, effective and reliable healthcare facilities in the rural and urban areas of the country, especially to the poor and vulnerable sections of the population.

NHM envisages a bottom-up, decentralized and community owned approach to public health planning.