GS-II: Rheumatic fever

News

The government is planning to procure penicillin centrally for three years and give it to all children between 5-15 years who are diagnosed with rheumatic fever. The drug will be dispensed through primary health centres or administered by ASHAs.

Rheumatic fever:

- A rare but potentially life-threatening disease, rheumatic fever is a complication of untreated strep throat caused by bacteria called group A streptococcus.
- The main symptoms are fever, muscle aches, swollen and painful joints, and in some cases, a red rash typically begin two to four weeks.
- The knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists are the joints most likely to become swollen from rheumatic fever.
- The pain often migrates from one joint to another.
- However, the greatest danger from the disease is the damage it can do to the heart.

Why a concern?

- India has a high burden of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, the latter often goes undiagnosed and leads to many maternal deaths at the time of childbirth.
- Studies indicate the prevalence of rheumatic heart disease in India to be about 2/1000 population.
- However, surveys conducted in school children in the age group of 5-16 years by ICMR gives overall prevalence of 6/1000.
- Rheumatic fever is endemic in India and remains one of the major causes of cardiovascular disease, accounting for nearly 25-45% of acquired heart disease.

Reviving Penicillin:

- Penicillin, discovered in 1928, is still the first line antibiotic in many western countries, but it gradually went out of the Indian market even though some of its more expensive derivatives continue to be prescribed.
- Penicillin appears to reduce the attack rate in rheumatic fever by as much as 80%.
- Penicillin went out of production in India because of unrealistic price control.