Syllabus subtopic:

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; efforts made by India in this regard; about coronavirus outbreak and its impact; about WHO

News: The World Health Organisation (WHO) said that the countries affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) will be scored on the level of clinical severity.

About the move

- India is also among the 24 affected countries which will be part of the global COVID-19 data platform, which will collect clinical data from all affected countries and is now working on a score for each in terms of clinical severity.

- Scoring means from asymptomatic to severe illness and death. The score card is yet to be finalised.

Cases of coronavirus

According to WHO, there were 42,708 confirmed cases reported in China and 1,017 people have lost their lives to this virus. Of these, there are 393 cases in 24 countries and one death outside China.

Discussions held by WHO

- Around 350 scientists were brought together in Geneva from February 11 to 12 to discuss the knowledge gaps and key research priorities in various areas such as epidemiology, animal reservoir and transmission, natural history, efficacy of public health interventions, development of new vaccines and therapeutics (mostly repurposed drugs at this time).
The WHO has activated its R&D Blueprint — a global strategy and preparedness plan during epidemics.

Efforts made by India through setting up laboratories

- India has set up 106 Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) towards lab support. From just two nodal laboratories at the helm of affairs for diagnostics during the H1N1 influenza virus (swine flu) outbreak in 2009-10, the Indian Council of Medical Research has now established 106 VRDLs, of which 14 are strategically located near international airports and have been equipped to provide lab support and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- VRDLs at government medical colleges at Ahmedabad and Guwahati were also identified within the network to start testing samples for COVID-19.

- The ICMR-National Institute of Virology is the apex laboratory in Pune for reconfirmation of any positive samples and quality assurance for testing of samples.

- The National Centre for Disease Control in New Delhi is also engaged in performing tests for novel coronavirus (nCoV) infections.

- To ensure there is readiness across the country to test a large number of samples in the event of any kind of outbreak, the Department of Health Research had launched a phase-wise expansion of the laboratory network. The estimated cost in 2013 was Rs 550 crore for a five-year phase-wise expansion programme which now has got extended. While the renewal of the programme is in process, the project cost has gone upt to Rs 700 crore.

- The sole criteria for setting up the VRDL was that it should be established at a government medical college. The site visits were conducted to ensure adequate space. Ninety-seven per cent of the laboratory network is across government medical colleges and barely 3 per cent with
ICMR institutions.

- The VRDL is functional even at remote locations such as the Late Sri Baliram Kashyap Memorial Government Medical College in Maoist-affected Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh.