



Season's worst

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Season's worst-A concerted public health push is required to tackle periodic outbreaks of influenza

- Seasonal influenza poses a significant public health challenge for India every year.
- The spurt in infections during the first two weeks of 2019 cries out for an effective plan to contain it.
- There have been peaks in the country over the past six years, with the number of cases recorded by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme soaring to 42,592 and the death toll touching 2,990 in 2015.
- With better understanding of the nature of active viruses and the availability of a quadrivalent vaccine, State governments have no excuse for failing to sharply reduce the spread.
- It is pertinent to ask what preventive measures were put in place based on the experience.
- A universal preventive programme should be considered at least for the future.
- Last year, the Union Health Ministry put out an advisory on the right vaccine to protect against a known set of viruses, such as Influenza A H1N1, H3N2 and Influenza B.
- Yet, most public health programmes are not prepared for a mass adoption of the vaccine.
- Non-availability of sufficient doses of quadrivalent vaccine as well as profiteering on the demand have not been addressed.
- If a vaccine has proven efficacy in reducing the burden of seasonal influenza, it must be made part of the public health system.
- An umbrella scheme such as Ayushman Bharat can easily provide it to everyone using public and private institutions.
- When it comes to treatment, the availability of anti-viral drugs such as Oseltamivir in the public health system should be ensured.
- Seasonal influenza will, according to the WHO, continue to resurface.
- India must prepare for it with a comprehensive programme that covers

all the States.

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