

Penicillin to fight rheumatic fever

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Why in news?

The government plans to resurrect penicillin in order to combat rheumatic fever.

What is rheumatic fever?

- It is an **endemic disease in India**.
- It is a disease that can affect the heart, joints, brain, and skin.
- Rheumatic fever can develop if strep throat and scarlet fever infections are not treated properly.
- Bacteria called **group A Streptococcus or group A strep** cause strep throat and scarlet fever.
- Rheumatic fever is thought to be caused by a response of the body's defense system – the immune system.
- The **immune system responds to the earlier strep throat or scarlet fever infection and causes a generalized inflammatory response**.
- Though **it's not contagious**, people with strep throat or scarlet fever can spread group A strep to others, primarily through respiratory droplets.
- Common signs and symptoms are Fever, painful and tender joints (arthritis), most commonly in the knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists, fatigue and in some cases a red rash.
- It is more common in school-age children (5 through 15 years old).
- India has a high rheumatic fever burden and rheumatic disease, which often goes undiagnosed and contributes to multiple maternal deaths at birth.
- Penicillin tends to reduce the rheumatic fever attack

rate by as much as 80%.