

*Syllabus* : Health organisations : Red Cross, WHO.

*Major activities of the Red Cross and WHO.*



**Health** is one of the primary concerns of all the governments of the world. They strive to take steps individually at the national level as well as collectively at the global level to safeguard the health interests of their people. This chapter is aimed at familiarising the students with two main organisations, namely the Red Cross and WHO.

### 18.1 COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS IN INDIA

India is a vast country. It has highly diverse geographical and climatic conditions. Its population is distributed in broadly five types of habitations :

1. **Big cities.** These have multi-storeyed buildings, too many vehicles, heavily burdened water supply and sewage systems, some with lots of industries, either inside the township or outside.
2. **Small towns.** Not so crowded.
3. **Villages.** Small population, agriculture based; dairies, poultry farming, cottage industries, etc. are the main sources of livelihood.
4. **Remote areas.** Tribal people, mostly thriving on forests and forest products; neither proper drinking water nor any medical facility is available.
5. **Slum-dwellings.** Slums and Jhuggi-Jhompris are a common sight at all places specially on the outskirts of big cities. Unhealthy, unhygienic conditions prevail in them.

**Health problems.** The health problems differ in each kind of habitation. However, we may generalise them as follows :-

#### (A) Food and water borne diseases.

Several diseases specially **diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, typhoid, dysentery**, are very common in areas deficient in proper water supply. At many places, water from hand-pumps and other sources is contaminated.

At certain places, harmful mineral contents in water obtained through wells or hand-pumps cause health problems.

Untreated sewage or effluents from industries poured into rivers and other water bodies harm the people living alongside.

#### (B) Insect and air-borne diseases.

The public in general, and specially the uneducated village folk, are not conscious of the flies which alight on exposed food stuff and contaminate them.

Lack of general cleanliness leads to breeding of houseflies, mosquitoes, and other insects which cause diseases.

#### Extra : Not in syllabus

#### CATEGORIES OF HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

Every country is concerned about the health and well being of its people. For achieving this goal, several kinds of organisations have been working at different levels. We can broadly classify them into three categories on the basis of the level at which they work :

- A. Local bodies
- B. National organisations
- C. International organisations

#### LOCAL BODIES

All cities, towns and even the larger villages have some kind of a local body to look after the

health and sanitation of their people. These include **Municipal Corporations, Municipalities, Town Area Committees**, etc. They have regular staff and equipment for looking after the following :

1. **Sanitation** : Removal and proper disposal of garbage, sewage and other wastes, elimination of breeding places of flies, mosquitoes, etc.
2. **Supply of safe drinking water**
3. **Vaccinations** : Immunisation (developing resistance to diseases) of the infants and others to protect them from several infectious diseases such as tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, measles, etc. These programmes are intensified whenever there is a risk of an epidemic breaking out.
4. **Keeping statistical records** : Apart from compulsory registration of births and deaths, every other kind of information about the health and diseases of the people in their area is to be regularly maintained.

#### NATIONAL BODIES

In India, several agencies, Institutes and Research Centres are actively engaged in studying the health problems of the country. These centres are in particular working on the following diseases :

- |                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| 1. Malaria      | 2. Dengue  |
| 3. Tuberculosis | 4. Leprosy |
| 5. Cholera      |            |

For each such disease, they undertake a regular survey, identification of the transmitting agent and its breeding places, arranging prophylactic immunisation, and any other kind of steps to be taken to fight against the respective diseases.

National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) (earlier known as Malaria Institute) located at Delhi is seriously engaged in doing research on infectious diseases.

An extensive national programme under "Pulse Polio" has been launched to fully eradicate poliomyelitis.

## 18.2 INTERNATIONAL BODIES

Two most important International bodies concerned with people's health are:

1. Red Cross
2. WHO (World Health Organisation)

### 18.2.1 RED CROSS

The Red Cross is a national as well as an International agency. The main function of Red Cross Society is to perform activities which should prevent or remove human sufferings in peace time as well as at the time of war. It was formally founded in 1864. The emblem of the Red Cross Society is a red-coloured cross painted on a white background.



Fig. 18.1 : The emblem of the Red Cross

People belonging to the Red Cross can go to battlefields and take care of the wounded soldiers whether friends or enemies. Major activities of Red Cross Societies are as follows:

1. To extend relief and help to the victims of any calamity — flood, fire, famine, earthquakes, etc.
2. To procure and supply blood for the needy victims of war or other calamities.
3. To extend all possible first-aid in any accident.
4. To educate people in accident prevention.
5. To arrange for ambulance service in all emergencies.
6. To look after maternal and child welfare centres.
7. The Indian Red Cross Society has also been engaged in training midwives.

**Red Cross Day**  
8, May

#### WRONG USE OF RED CROSS

This Red Cross emblem is very often used by hospitals, ambulances, doctors and nurses for quick identification but legally, it is wrong. Only the Red Cross Society units can use it.

### 18.2.2 WHO (WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) established in 1948, is a specialised agency of the United Nations Organisation (UNO).

## Reasons for the formation of WHO

Member countries of the UNO focused on the need for creating an international body to look after the health problems of people of the world. This was particularly felt in the field of research on the causes and cures of diseases. The combined efforts in this direction were to give better and faster results. The poor and developing countries were to benefit quickly.

WHO has six regional offices in the world including one in Delhi. Each regional office works for its member countries. Its headquarters are located in Geneva. Member states of WHO are bound by the International Sanitary Regulations to send in all relevant information about the Internationally notifiable diseases. Malaria and small-pox are two such notifiable diseases.

### Main activities of WHO are as follows :

1. To **collect and supply information** about the occurrence of diseases of epidemic nature (such as cholera, plague, typhoid, yellow fever, small pox, etc.).
2. To promote and support **projects for research** on diseases.

3. To supply information on **latest developments about the use of vaccines**, cancer research, nutritional discoveries, control of drug addiction and about health hazards of nuclear radiation.
4. To suggest **quarantine measures** (isolation of patient) to prevent spread of disease to others.
5. To lay **pharmaceutical standards** for important drugs, to ensure purity and size of the dose.
6. To **organise campaigns** for the control of epidemic (widespread) and endemic (local) diseases. [One example of an endemic disease is the simple goitre due to iodine deficiency].



### PROGRESS CHECK

1. In which year was WHO established ?  
.....
2. Name the world organisations concerned with the following :
  - (i) Campaigning for control of endemic goitre  
.....
  - (ii) Supplying food and other facilities to children in schools  
.....

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

### A. MULTIPLE CHOICE TYPE

(Select the most appropriate option in each case)

1. Red Cross Day is celebrated on
  - (a) May 8
  - (b) June 23
  - (c) September 17
  - (d) November 21
2. WHO headquarters are located in
  - (a) Paris
  - (b) Berlin
  - (c) Geneva
  - (d) New York

### B. VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE

1. **Match** the activities in Column I with the respective organisation in Column II (there can be one or more than one activity).

Column I (Activity)	Column II (Organisation)
(i) To extend relief to victims of earthquake	(A) Red Cross
(ii) To lay pharmaceutical standards for important drugs	(B) WHO

- (iii) Arranging ambulance in emergencies
  - (iv) To suggest quarantine measures
  - (v) Training of midwives
  - (vi) Procuring and supplying blood for transfusion.
2. **Where** are the headquarters of WHO located ?
  3. **What** do the following abbreviations stand for ?
    - (a) WHO
    - (b) UNO

### C. SHORT ANSWER TYPE

1. **List** any three **health problems** in India.
2. **State** two functions of WHO.
3. **State** the main functions of Red Cross.
4. **State** the main functions of World Health Organisation.

### D. LONG ANSWER TYPE

1. **Describe** the reasons for the formation of WHO.