

Liver cancer on mind, govt to give free antiviral for hepatitis C

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HEALTH MINISTER JPNadda will launch an ambitious programme to control viral hepatitis later this week, under which an expensive antiviral for hepatitis C infections will be made available free of cost at all government hospitals.

The National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme will be launched at Vigyan Bhawan on July 28 which is observed as World Hepatitis Day. A stamp will also be released on the occasion. The programme aims at both prevention and treatment of hepatitis which is among the leading causes of liver cancer, cirrhosis of liver and acute liver failure. According to a 2014 study in the Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hepatology, incidence rate of liver cancer in India for men ranges from 0.7 to 7.5 and for women between 0.2 and 2.2 per 100,000 population per



JPNadda will launch the hepatitis programme on July 28

year. The male to female ratio for liver cancer in India is 4:1.

As part of the National Health Mission, the programme will set up and upgrade facilities for the diagnosis and treatment primarily of hepatitis B and C. Designated treatment centres will provide the anti-viral to hepatitis C patients. They will also provide hepatitis B vaccine to babies born to mothers carrying the virus within 24 hours of birth.

Sofosbuvir, the anti-viral for Hepatitis C costs \$63,000-94,000 for the full course in the US and Europe.

Anti-hepatitis C virus (HCV) antibody prevalence in the general population is estimated to be between 0.09 and 15 per cent. Based on some regional level

studies, it is estimated that there are 6-12 million people with hepatitis C in India. Chronic HCV infection accounts for 12 to 32 per cent of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) and 12-20 per cent of cirrhosis cases. The programme aims to treat a minimum of 3 lakh hepatitis C cases over a period of three years.

Hepatitis A and E viruses are important causes of acute viral hepatitis and acute liver failure (ALF). Hepatitis A virus is responsible for 10-30 per cent of acute hepatitis and 5-15 per cent of acute liver failure cases in India. Hepatitis E virus is said to be responsible for 10-40 per cent of acute hepatitis and 15-45 per cent of acute liver failure cases.

A senior health ministry official said, "We have got approval for Rs 600 crore for 2018-19 for the programme but the actual spending will depend on how many states take it up. Hepatitis A and E are not chronic so the focus of the programme will be on Hepatitis B and C..."