

What is an urban area?

According to Census of India

A. All statutory places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, etc.

B. A place satisfying the following three criteria simultaneously:

- i. a minimum population of 5,000;
- ii. at least 75 per cent of male working population engaged in non- agricultural pursuits; and
- iii. a density of population of at least 400 per sq. km. (1,000 per sq. mile).

Urbanization refers to the change in size, density and heterogeneity of cities

What is urban health?

- The health of a population that lives and works closely together, usually in an incorporated area, such as a city or town, with a common water supply and with similar environmental conditions
- The status of health in urban populations
- Urban Health means putting the needs of people and communities at the heart of the urban planning process to ensure better access to urban services which improve human health for all

Impact of urbanisation on health

- Environmental concerns
- Housing and shelter quality: strong health determinants
- Health hazards of poor water supply and sanitation
- Violence and crime
- Mental health, loneliness and depression
- Substance abuse
- Road traffic accidents

- Climate change
- Fuel
- Health inequity

These health issues can broadly be trisected — diseases that are primarily related to slums and the urban poor, diseases that afflict the class of people who have sedentary jobs and odd hours of work and diseases that go beyond socio-economic boundaries and afflict all city dwellers. It must, however, be added that these boundaries are getting blurred as diseases are crossing socio-economic limits, as has been witnessed in the case of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

The habitat that the urban poor are for the most part forced to occupy are run down zones. Since they are largely unplanned, they develop into slums that could be termed as environmentally deprived. Their numbers rise as cities grow in size. These are areas of high human density and have limited access to potable water, sanitation and other basic services. As a consequence, many times, their health indicators are worse than those in rural areas. High human densities and lack of ventilation make them prone to communicable diseases such as tuberculosis. It was a disease that was considered comprehensively tackled, but it has reappeared in slums with worrisome force. Waterborne and vector-borne diseases such as dengue are linked to unsafe water storage and poor waste management, especially seen among urban poor settlements. Additionally, they also are susceptible to acute respiratory diseases from indoor air pollution and diarrhoeal diseases from unsafe drinking water and sanitation.

Among the middle classes, their current lifestyle includes fast-paced life with sedentary duties. Many of the jobs require odd hours of work and promote a stressful environment and unhealthy food habits. Indian cities, in general, have more people living per square kilometre of space than other cities around the world, leading to under-provision of public open spaces for recreation and exercise. These factors in totality predispose them to diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. Work stress, unhealthy lifestyle, and polluted food intake also lead to different kinds of cancer.

Urbanisation also brings about profound changes in social organisation and in the pattern of family life. A key outcome is reduced social support so readily available in villages. The rise of nuclear families especially makes urbanites vulnerable to psychological trauma

and to mental disorders. These include dementia, depression, substance abuse, alcoholism and family disintegration.

There is rising incidence of air pollution across many Indian cities. In 2016, the World Health Organisation (WHO) listed 14 Indian cities among the world's 20 most polluted. Air pollution has given rise to a diverse group of respiratory diseases. As people breathe, microscopic particles get drawn into lungs and to the bloodstream causing asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and heart disease. They have a negative impact on the development of children and even affect the brain.

The National Health Policy (NHP) 2002 acknowledged this need to focus on the urban population and a National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) was launched in 2013. The pace of this programme, however, has been sluggish. While there is a case for scaling up NUHM with a strong focus on the urban poor, cities themselves need to recalibrate their local health programmes to respond to these health challenges. These renewed efforts would evidently necessitate a larger public funding for urban health. Given the state of municipal finances, however, that appears to be a tall order. It is obvious that the Centre and the States would have to play the major part.