

Occasional News Wrap - #21/ October - December, 2025



Evolving Public Health Priorities: From Mental Health to Clean Air

October 01 - December 31, 2025

During October-December 2025, a wide range of developments highlighted growing health, environmental and regulatory challenges in India, alongside policy responses and global guidance.

Mental health remained under-prioritised despite legal frameworks, reinforcing calls for integrated care, higher funding and workforce expansion. Reforms in public health financing and insurance aimed to improve affordability and transparency, but rising out-of-pocket spending continued to expose households to financial risk.

Environmental health concerns intensified as severe air pollution drove spikes in respiratory illnesses and medicine use, prompting renewed calls to strengthen clean-air laws and enforcement. Food safety emerged as a major regulatory focus, with authorities cracking down on adulteration, unsafe disposal practices, misleading labelling and non-compliant food establishments to protect consumer health.

Nutrition and child health risks, including malnutrition and unsafe medicines, underscored gaps in preventive care and regulatory oversight. At the same time, rising infectious and lifestyle-related health risks, from pneumonia to sleep deprivation, highlighted the need for stronger public awareness and preventive strategies. Collectively, these developments underscore the urgency of coordinated policy action across health, the environment, and food safety to safeguard public well-being.

Overall, the quarter reflected a convergence of health, environment and governance issues, underscoring the need for coordinated policy action, stronger regulation, preventive strategies and sustained investment to protect public health and resilience.

S.N.	Article/Op-ed	Key Takeaway
1.	India Needs a Unified Mental Health Plan <i>Samayeta Bal</i> <i>The Hindu</i> <i>October 10, 2025</i>	<p>The article underscores India’s urgent need for a coordinated and inclusive mental-health strategy. Despite legal frameworks such as the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, access to care remains limited due to fragmented services, workforce shortages and persistent stigma. It calls for higher public spending, integration of mental health into primary healthcare, expansion of trained professionals, and stronger national programmes such as DMHP and Tele-MANAS to ensure equitable and effective mental health support nationwide.</p>
2.	CGHS Rate Overhaul Lifts Hospital Stocks <i>Dr. Asawari Savant</i> <i>eHealth Network</i> <i>October 13, 2025</i>	<p>The government has introduced a significant overhaul of the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) package rates, effective 13 October 2025, to modernise reimbursements for nearly 2,000 medical procedures. The new multi-factor structure links rates to hospital accreditation, city tier and ward entitlement, aiming to improve transparency and consistency in payments. This reform boosted investor confidence, with shares of major hospital chains rising due to anticipated revenue and margin improvements from the updated rates.</p>
3.	Malnutrition Returns, Demands Urgent Action <i>Nature</i> <i>October 14, 2025</i>	<p>The editorial warns that malnutrition is resurging globally and demands urgent action. Although progress has been made toward eliminating malnutrition among children under five under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, recent trends indicate a worsening situation. Scientists must urgently identify the causes behind this rise so that policymakers can develop effective strategies to reverse it. The piece emphasises that no one should suffer from hunger in the 21st century, and coordinated efforts are essential to tackle this growing crisis.</p>
4.	Delhi Air Pollution Hits 15× WHO Limit <i>The Hindu</i> <i>October 21, 2025</i>	<p>Delhi’s air quality worsened sharply after the Diwali celebrations on October 21, 2025, despite allowing “green crackers” for limited hours. Smog and high emissions led to very poor to hazardous AQI levels across multiple monitoring stations, raising health concerns for residents. Factors such as fireworks, prevailing weather conditions and additional pollutants contributed to the spike, showing that limited measures and green crackers did not prevent dangerous air quality levels this year.</p>

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5.	NHRC Flags Reuse of Cooking Oil <i>The Economics Times</i> October 24, 2025	The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a notice to the Union Health Ministry and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) following a complaint alleging widespread reuse of cooking oil by eateries and food vendors, posing serious public health risks, including cancer, heart disease, and liver disease. The NHRC has asked both bodies to investigate and provide a state-wise report and action taken report within two weeks. The complaint also highlighted environmental pollution from discarded oil.
6.	Uphold Children's Health Rights Jayanthi Natarajan <i>The Hindu</i> October 25, 2025	The piece argues that India must urgently protect and prioritise children's health rights , especially after recent tragedies linked to contaminated medicines. It calls for stronger regulation of paediatric drugs, stricter ethical standards in clinical trials and enhanced oversight of over-the-counter medication to prevent future harm. It stresses that ensuring safe, adequate healthcare for children is a fundamental obligation and that systemic reforms are needed to uphold their health rights and prevent avoidable deaths.
7.	IHR Emergency Panel Meets on Mpox Surge WHO October 30, 2025	The WHO announced that, after its fifth meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee on the mpox upsurge, the Director-General determined that the 2024 mpox event no longer qualifies as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Current standing recommendations, extended until 20 August 2026, remain in place to guide States Parties in controlling the spread of mpox. WHO thanked committee members for their advice and commitment to global health action.
8.	WHO Pushes Strategic Urban Health Action <i>News On WHO</i> October 31, 2025	The WHO has urged national and city leaders to adopt a strategic approach to urban health to make cities healthier, more equitable, and more resilient as urban populations grow rapidly. It launched a new guide, "Taking a strategic approach to urban health", offering a framework to integrate health into policy, planning and cross-sector action. The initiative highlights that urban areas face overlapping risks such as pollution, poor housing, and inequities, yet also offer opportunities for sustainable, healthy societies if addressed collaboratively.

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9.	FSSAI Advisory on Disposal of Expired Food <i>Deepti Verma</i> <i>Republic World</i> <i>November 04, 2025</i>	Food regulator FSSAI has issued an advisory after reports that seized, rejected and expired food items were being dumped into rivers and other natural water bodies, posing risks to public health and the environment. The advisory reiterates existing procedures under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and strictly prohibits disposing of such food and packaging in water bodies or open land. It directs food safety officers to ensure compliant disposal, such as incineration or sanitary landfills, and submit monthly compliance reports to FSSAI.
10.	Poor Sleep Linked to Serious Brain Diseases <i>The Economics Times</i> <i>November 08, 2025</i>	Poor sleep can have immediate and long-term effects on brain health, warns Hyderabad-based neurologist Dr Sudhir Kumar of Apollo Hospitals. Even a single sleepless night may disrupt neural balance, worsen migraines, tremors and epilepsy symptoms, and impair focus and memory. Chronic sleep deprivation increases risks of cognitive decline, dementia and stroke by interfering with the brain's natural restorative processes. He urges people to prioritise consistent, quality sleep to protect neurological function and overall health.
11.	Food Safety Compliance Deadline for Hotels <i>Greater Kashmir</i> <i>November 09, 2025</i>	Food Safety authorities have given hotels, restaurants, dhabas, and other food outlets one month to fully comply with food safety regulations to ensure safe, wholesome food for consumers. Establishments must obtain or renew valid FSSAI licences, display the Food Safety Display Board with licence details and hygiene declarations, and adopt proper practices such as water testing, pest control, trained supervisors and safe waste disposal. Failure to comply may result in inspections and enforcement action under the Food Safety and Standards Act.
12.	Pneumonia Rise Calls for Awareness and Action <i>The Times of India</i> <i>November 14, 2025</i>	Rising pneumonia cases in children and the elderly are drawing urgent attention as the disease increasingly affects these vulnerable groups. Pneumonia remains a leading infectious killer of children under five worldwide and is also dangerous for older adults, especially those with weakened immunity or chronic conditions. Factors such as incomplete vaccination, malnutrition, indoor air pollution, crowded living conditions and antibiotic resistance are contributing to higher rates and greater severity, highlighting the need for awareness and preventive action.

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13.	PAC Questions FSSAI for Adulterated Food Sales <i>The Hindu</i> November 21, 2025	Unchecked sale of adulterated food products like ghee, milk and other staples was sharply questioned by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which grilled officials of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) over enforcement gaps, weak monitoring and manpower shortages. MPs expressed concern that rampant adulteration undermines consumer safety and called for stronger compliance mechanisms, regular sampling, stricter action and better implementation of food-safety standards nationwide.
14.	FSSAI Orders Removal of Mislabelled ‘ORS’ Drinks <i>Indian Express</i> November 21, 2025	FSSAI has ordered that all beverages misleadingly labelled “ORS” (Oral Rehydration Solution) be removed immediately from shops and online platforms, as they can confuse consumers and may worsen dehydration rather than treat it, especially in children. Only products that meet the World Health Organisation-recommended ORS formulation may use the label; others are considered misbranded and must be removed from the market, with enforcement by state authorities.
15.	Respiratory Drug Sales Surge Amid Poor AQI <i>Teena Thacker</i> <i>The Economic Times</i> December 09, 2025	Worsening air quality in India in November 2025 led to a significant rise in respiratory drug sales, with the market growing about eight percent year-on-year as people increasingly sought treatments for asthma, COPD, allergies and related breathing issues. Data show that the anti-asthma and COPD segments recorded double-digit growth in several states, reflecting a clear link between pollution-linked health burdens and higher medicine demand during peak winter smog.
16.	India’s Biggest Health Policy Shifts of 2025 <i>Shreya Goswami</i> <i>NDTV News</i> December 11, 2025	India’s significant health policy changes in 2025 reshaped access, costs and care delivery. The government implemented consolidated labour codes, boosting workplace safety and occupational health obligations. A GST overhaul simplified tax slabs, lowering out-of-pocket costs for some health services. Revised GRAP rules strengthened emergency air-quality actions. Public health programmes expanded: Ayushman Bharat broadened cashless coverage, while eSanjeevani and Tele-MANAS scaled telemedicine and mental-health care. Fiscal measures raised excise on harmful products to curb tobacco use and fund health initiatives.

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17.	Why Healthcare Costs Remain High <i>Policy Circle</i> December 11, 2025	Many Indian households still face high out-of-pocket (OOP) healthcare costs despite government schemes and insurance expansion, leaving families vulnerable to financial distress when ill. Although OOP spending as a share of total health expenditure has fallen from over 60 percent to around 39 percent in recent years, most hospitalisation costs and treatments remain paid directly by individuals, especially in rural areas. Limited insurance coverage, rising medical inflation, workforce shortages and underfunded public facilities perpetuate financial risk, highlighting the need for deeper health-financing reforms.
18.	FSSAI Cracks Down on Adulterated Dairy <i>Syed Muskan Shafiq</i> <i>The Logical India</i> December 17, 2025	FSSAI has ordered a nationwide crackdown on adulterated milk, paneer and khoya amid health concerns during the festive season, directing States and Union Territories to launch special enforcement drives with intensive inspections, laboratory testing and strict penalties for violations. Licenced and unlicensed dairy units will be inspected, adulteration sources traced, and actions such as licence suspension, product seizure, and closure enforced, with real-time reporting to the Food Safety Compliance System to protect consumers from unsafe dairy products.
19.	FSSAI Tightens Norms on Use of ‘Tea’ <i>DD News</i> December 26, 2025	FSSAI has tightened norms on the use of the word “tea”, clarifying that only beverages made from the <i>Camellia sinensis</i> plant, such as green, Kangra and instant tea, can legally be labelled and marketed as tea. Using the terms “herbal infusions” or “plant-based drinks” for products such as rooibos, flower, or herbal blends constitutes misbranding under the Food Safety and Standards Act. It must stop, with strict enforcement directed to state food safety authorities.
20.	Clean Air Act Needs an Urgent Overhaul <i>The Economic Times</i> December 29, 2025	Pollution levels in India remain dangerously high, and the existing Clean Air Act is outdated, inconsistent and poorly enforced, undermining efforts to protect public health and the environment. The editorial argues that India urgently needs to revise and strengthen clean-air laws, set national ambient air quality standards, improve monitoring and accountability, and align regulations with global best practices. Without robust legal action, health risks from smog and toxic air will continue to grow across cities and states.