

## WHO Announced The Reclassification of 'Hepatitis D' as Cancerous

The World Health Organization (WHO), through its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), has officially reclassified hepatitis D (HDV) as a Group 1 carcinogen, a proven cause of cancer in humans. This places it alongside hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV), which were already recognized for their role in causing liver cancer. The move is intended to raise global awareness of the growing public health crisis caused by viral hepatitis.

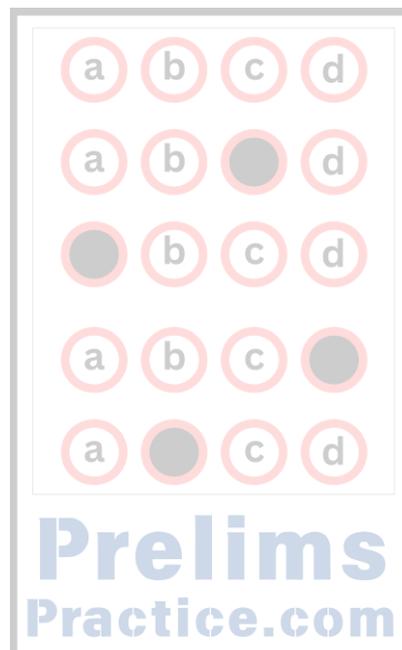
### Why hepatitis D was reclassified

- **Unique dependency on hepatitis B:** HDV is a "defective" virus that cannot replicate on its own. It requires the presence of HBV to infect and assemble new viral particles, which means HDV infection can only occur in people who also have HBV.
- **Amplified liver cancer risk:** In individuals co-infected with both HBV and HDV, the risk of developing liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma) is significantly higher—between two and six times higher than in those with HBV alone.
- **Accelerated liver damage:** Chronic HDV infection is considered the most severe form of viral hepatitis. It accelerates the progression of liver damage, leading to a much faster onset of liver cirrhosis, liver failure, and death.
- **Mechanism of action:** HDV intensifies the carcinogenic effect of HBV. While HBV can cause cancer by integrating its DNA into liver cells, HDV amplifies this effect through distinct molecular mechanisms that lead to genetic instability.

### Public health implications of the reclassification

- **Urgent action required:** The new classification emphasizes the urgency for preventing and managing viral hepatitis. The WHO estimates that hepatitis B, C, and D affect over 300 million people worldwide and cause 1.3 million deaths annually, primarily from cirrhosis and cancer.
- **Increased testing and surveillance:** The IARC designation is expected to drive increased resources toward HDV testing, especially for people with chronic HBV infection who may not know their HDV status.

- **Boosted research and funding:** The classification will likely increase funding for research into new HDV-specific therapies, which are currently limited.
- **Renewed focus on hepatitis B vaccination:** Since HDV cannot exist without HBV, preventing HBV through vaccination is the most effective way to prevent HDV infection. The reclassification highlights the need to increase global hepatitis B vaccination coverage, which remains low in many regions.
- **Integration of care:** Countries are encouraged to scale up and integrate hepatitis services, including vaccination, testing, and treatment, into national health systems to make them more accessible.



## Explanation of Exam Oriented Key Terms

### 01

### Hepatitis

Hepatitis is liver inflammation, caused by viruses (A, B, C, D, E), alcohol, drugs, or autoimmune issues. Key points for UPSC include the five viral types and their distinct transmission routes (A/E: fecal-oral; B/C: blood/body fluids), the WHO's 2030 elimination goal, India's Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) including the Hepatitis B vaccine, and the prevention/treatment differences (e.g., vaccines for A/B, medication for C, danger of chronic B/C leading to cirrhosis/cancer).

#### What is hepatitis?

- Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver, most commonly caused by a viral infection.
- It can also be caused by non-infectious agents such as excessive alcohol use, certain medications, toxins, and autoimmune diseases.
- Inflammation of the liver can impair its vital functions, which include processing nutrients, filtering blood, and fighting infections.
- The condition can be self-limiting (acute) or can progress to chronic hepatitis, which can lead to progressive scarring of the liver (cirrhosis) or liver cancer.

#### Types of viral hepatitis

The five main types of viral hepatitis are A, B, C, D, and E.

##### Hepatitis A (HAV)

**Transmission:** Spread through the fecal-oral route, primarily by ingesting contaminated food or water.

**Nature:** It is an acute, short-term illness.

**Symptoms:** Include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, and jaundice.

**Prevention:** A safe and effective vaccine is available.

## Practice Questions:

### 1. Consider the following statements:

**Statement I:** The recent carcinogenic classification of Hepatitis D (HDV) is a wake-up call for intensified global action on viral hepatitis.

**Statement II:** The reclassification was based on a significant increase in recent infections, indicating a new outbreak.

### Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II explains Statement I
- b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II does not explain Statement I
- c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is not correct
- d) Statement I is not correct but Statement II is correct

**Answer: c**

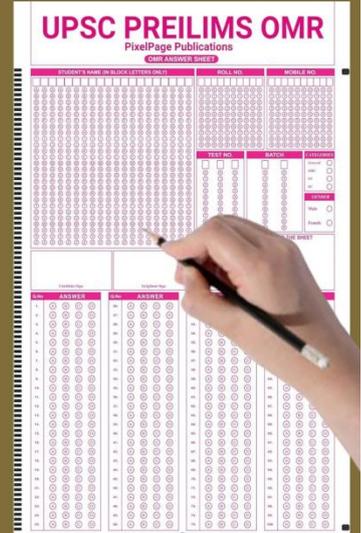
**Explanation: Statement I is Correct:** The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of the WHO, has indeed recently reclassified the Hepatitis D virus (HDV) as a Group 1 carcinogen (proven to cause cancer in humans), placing it alongside Hepatitis B and C. This reclassification is considered a "wake-up call" to intensify global efforts in prevention, screening, and treatment, as HDV significantly increases the risk of liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma (liver cancer). **Statement II is Not Correct:** The reclassification was not based on a significant increase in recent infections or a new outbreak. Instead, it was based on a comprehensive review of existing data and studies, like one published in The Lancet Oncology, which confirmed a strong causal link and the degree to which HDV co-infection with Hepatitis B virus (HBV) accelerates liver damage and cancer risk (two to six times higher than HBV alone). The reclassification aims to raise awareness and mobilize resources to address a long-standing, often underreported, public health issue, not a new outbreak.

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