

## Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897: RSTV – In Depth

Rajya Sabha TV programs like ‘The Big Picture’, ‘In Depth’ and ‘India’s World’ are informative programs that are important for UPSC preparation. In this article, you can read about the discussions held in the ‘In Depth’ episode on “**Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897**” for the IAS exam.

### What’s in News?

With a rise in COVID-19 cases across the globe and in India, the states in India have gone into battle mode to contain the spread of COVID-19. All states and Union Territories have been directed to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, so that Health Ministry (Union and State Government) advisories are enforceable.

- States are taking strict measures to contain the spread of the virus. It is said that action will be taken against such suspect case or confirmed individuals who do not take sufficient measures or actions for prevention or treatment.
- The Epidemic Diseases Act is routinely enforced across the country for dealing with outbreak of diseases such as swine flu, dengue, and cholera.

### Epidemic Disease Act, 1897:

- This colonial Act was enacted by the British, for the first time in the then state of Bombay during the Bubonic Plague.
- It is a state government Act. The Act strives to protect the common citizens in a particular area during the outbreak of an epidemic or a dangerous disease.
- The colonial era Epidemic Diseases Act consists of four sections and aims to provide for better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.
- **Section 1** of the Act describes the title and extent of the Act.
- **Section 2** empowers state governments and Union Territories to formulate regulations to contain the outbreak.
  - When the State government is satisfied that the state is threatened with an outbreak of any dangerous epidemic disease, and if it thinks that the ordinary provisions of the law are insufficient, for the purpose, then, the state may take or require or empower any person to take some measures and by public notice prescribe such temporary regulations to be observed by the public.
  - The state government may prescribe regulations for the inspection of persons travelling by railway or otherwise, segregation in hospitals, temporary accommodation or otherwise, of persons suspected by the inspecting officer, of being infected with any such disease.
- **Section 3** provides penalties for disobeying any regulation made under the Act.
  - IPC Section 188 states that in case a person does not honour or refuses to honour the public order issued by a public servant, the punishment in such a case is upto 1 month or a fine upto Rs. 200 or both.
  - In case the general public suffers due to the refusal of the person to follow the public order, the punishment is upto 6 months of Jail and/ or fine or Rs. 2000.
- It provides for Six months’ imprisonment or Rs. 1000 fine or both on person disobeying the Act.
- **Section 4** deals with legal protection to implementing officers acting under the Act.

### Has the law been invoked earlier?

- This is not the first time that this law is being invoked in India.
- In 2018, the District Collector of Gujarat’s Vadodra issued a notification under the Act declaring the Khedkarmsiya village - Cholera affected.

- In 2015, to deal with Malaria and Dengue, in Chandigarh, the Act was implemented.
- In 2009, to tackle the Swine Flu outbreak in Pune, Section 2 of the Act was enforced to open screening centres in civic hospitals across the city and Swine Flu was declared a Notifiable Disease.
  - A notifiable disease is any disease that is required by law to be reported to government authorities.

### **What is an Epidemic?**

- Epidemic is a term that is often broadly used to describe a problem that has grown out of control. It occurs when an infectious disease spreads rapidly to several people within a country or location.
- Epidemics are generally highly communicable diseases that spread through the population in very short time.
- These diseases could be viral, bacterial or other health events such as obesity.

### **Epidemics World-wide:**

Throughout history, there have been a number of epidemics that have left a lasting impact on the population/ society.

#### **1. Plague of Justinian:**

- First recorded Epidemic in the history was the Plague of Justinian which occurred during the Byzantine Empire (541-542 AD).
- It is recorded to have caused the death of about 100 million (which was half of the world's population), resulting in the highest number of lives lost in the epidemic history.

#### **2. Black Plague of Europe (1346-1350):**

- 50 million people died from plague that began in Asia and was carried throughout the world by rats covered with infected flees.
- After arriving in Europe, it killed 60% of the continent's population.

#### **3. Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS):**

- It has been the longest lasting epidemic, still ongoing.
- The epidemic began in 1960. However, the world became aware of the epidemic only in 1980s.
- So far, the virus has caused the death of 39 million people world-wide.
- Medicine for treatment of HIV-AIDS became available only in 1987.
- The Virus is particularly aggressive in Sub-Saharan Africa with 69% of the global infections. Major reasons for the spread being poor economic conditions and little or no sex education.

#### **4. Other Major Epidemics:**

- Spanish Flu of 1918 claimed 20 million lives.
- Modern Plague (1894-1903) claimed 10 million lives.
- Asian Flu (1957-1958) resulted in the death of 2 million people.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> Cholera pandemic (1899-1923) resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million people.
- The Russian flu (1889-1890) killed 1 million people.
- The Hong Kong Flu (1968-1969) killed 1 million people.

### **COVID-19 updates:**

- The current Novel Corona Virus or [Covid-19](#) outbreak became an epidemic and was subsequently declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO), because of the ease with which the virus has been able to travel across the world.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for a virtual leadership summit through the video meet of the [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation \(SAARC\)](#) The video conference led to the creation of the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund.
- Markets world-wide have reacted negatively forcing the finance officials and central banks to take actions.
- Olympics 2020 that was to be held in Tokyo has also been postponed.