

Essential medicine list in India, 2022: A recent update

Received: 17th October 2022; *Accepted:* 25th December 2022; *Published:* 01st January 2023

Dear Editor:

The National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) serves as the primary guide for determining whether a drug is essential and setting price limits to keep drugs within reach of everyone. The list of necessary medications must be country-specific, that is, it must consider the current prevalence of diseases in the nation, the most commonly used drugs at the primary, secondary, and tertiary care levels of healthcare, the drugs used in the various national health programmes, as well as the drugs used to treat newly emerging and re-emerging infections [1].

World Health Organization, defines 'essential drugs or medicines as are those drugs that satisfy the healthcare needs of majority of the population; they should therefore be available at all times in adequate amounts and in appropriate dosage forms, at a price the community can afford' [2]. Majority of the Indian population's top healthcare demands are met by essential drugs. The first Indian 'National List of Essential Medicines' (NLEM) was created and published in 1996 by Ministry Health and Family Welfare. Ever since, it has undergone revisions in 2003, 2011, 2015 and now in 2022 [1].

The main goal of NLEM is to encourage rational medication usage by taking into account the three key factors of cost, safety, and efficacy and encourages prescriptions using generic names. NLEM, 2015 has been revised by the "The Independent Standing National Committee on Medicines" (SNCM), constituted by Union Health Ministry, after having an extensive consultation with experts and stakeholders, and it has been submitted to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare which is then released as NLEM, 2022 [1].

The criteria for inclusion in NLEM are as follows: be useful in diseases which is a public health problem in India; be licensed/ approved by Drugs Controller General (India) (DCGI); have proven efficacy and safety profile based on scientific evidence; be comparatively cost effective; be aligned with the current treatment guidelines; recommended under National Health Programs of India. (e.g. Ivermectin part of Accelerated Plan for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis 2018), when more than one medicine are available from the same therapeutic class, one prototype/ medically best suited medicine of that class to be included, where price of total treatment is considered and not the unit price of a medicine, then the fixed dose combinations are usually not included, vaccines are added as and when they are included in Universal Immunization Program (e.g. Rotavirus vaccine) [1]. There are 384 medicines in the new list spread over 27 therapeutic groups. The updated list now includes 34 additional medications while 26 have been taken off (Table-1).

The significance of NLEM 2022 is that, it has included four anti-cancer medicines, newer classes of diabetic drugs, and for the first time four drugs that are still under patent were included, which are Bedaquiline, Delamanid which used for TB, Dolutegravir used for HIV, and Daclatasvir for the treatment of Hepatitis C. Usually cancer therapies and patented drugs are very costly, but also have higher trade margins, therefore including them under this makes treatment affordable for a wide range of the population. To conclude, essential list should be periodically updated depending upon the current health situation

and demands of the Indian population and hope the current list, NLEM-2022 satisfies the same.

Table 1: List of new medicines added to NLEM-2022 [3]

S. No	Class of Drug	Name of the drug
1	Anti-filarial medicines	Ivermectin
2	Anti-bacterial medicines	Meropenem Cefuroxime Phenoxymethyl penicillin Procaine Benzylpenicillin
3	Anti-tuberculosis medicines	Amikacin Bedaquiline Delamanid
4	Anti-fungal medicines	Itraconazole Mupirocin Terbinafine
5	Anti-Cytomegalovirus (CMV) medicines	Valganciclovir
6	Anti HIV medicines	Lamivudine Tenofovir Dolutegravir Darunavir Ritonavir
7	Medicines for hepatitis B and hepatitis C	Daclatasvir, Tenofovir Alafenamide Fumarate (TAF)

S. No	Class of Drug	Name of the drug
8	Anti-neoplastic Medicines	Bendamustine Hydrochloride Irinotecan HCl Trihydrate Lenalidomide
9	Hormones and anti-hormones used in cancer therapy	Leuprolide acetate
10	Anti-platelet and Anti-thrombotic Medicines	Dabigatran Tenecteplase
11	Adrenal Hormones and Synthetic substitutes	Fludrocortisone
12	Hormonal Contraceptives	Ormeloxifene
13	Medicines used in diabetes mellitus	Insulin Glargine Teneligliptin
14	For universal immunization	Rotavirus vaccine
15	Miotics and Antiglaucoma Medicines	Latanoprost
16	Medicines for disorders due to psychoactive substance abuse	Buprenorphine Naloxone Nicotine (for nicotine replacement therapy)
17	Anti-asthmatic Medicines	Montelukast

Financial Support and sponsorship: Nil

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

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Cite this article as: Sharath U, Kalaivani A and Zubaida Begum A. Essential medicine list in India, 2022: A recent update. *Al Ameen J Med Sci* 2023; 16(1): 107-108.

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