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# QR-Code Drug Track-and-Trace Expanded to Fight Fakes and AMR

26 June 2026

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# QR-Code Drug Track-and-Trace Expanded to Fight Fakes and AMR

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## WHY IN NEWS

The Union Health Ministry expanded the mandatory barcode and QR-code track-and-trace requirement on medicine packaging to cover additional high-priority categories, including vaccines, antimicrobials, and anti-cancer drugs. The amendment to the Drugs Rules aims to curb spurious medicines and strengthen the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

## WHAT IS THE TRACK-AND-TRACE SYSTEM

A **track-and-trace system** places a unique, scannable code, in the form of a barcode or QR code, on a medicine pack. When scanned, the code reveals authentication and traceability details, allowing a patient, pharmacist, or regulator to verify that the medicine is genuine and to follow its journey through the supply chain.

The code typically encodes the following details:

DATA FIELD	PURPOSE
Unique product identification code	Authenticates the specific pack
Batch or lot number	Enables targeted recall
Manufacturing and expiry dates	Confirms shelf-life validity
Manufacturing licence number	Links to the licensed producer

## THE REGULATORY BASIS

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Medicine regulation in India operates under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and the **Drugs Rules, 1945** framed under it. The track-and-trace requirement was first applied to the top-selling branded medicines and is now being extended to additional categories through an amendment placing them under the relevant schedule of the Drugs Rules.

The requirement that the code appear on the **primary packaging**, the layer in direct contact with the medicine (or on the secondary packaging where space is constrained), ensures authentication even when outer cartons are discarded. The rollout is staggered: vaccines, anti-cancer drugs, and narcotic and psychotropic medicines are covered from **July 1, 2026**, while antimicrobials come under the requirement from **July 1, 2028**.

## WHY IT MATTERS: COUNTERFEITS AND AMR

The expansion serves two public-health goals.

### Combating Spurious Drugs

Counterfeit and substandard medicines endanger patients, undermine trust in healthcare, and damage the credibility of India's pharmaceutical exports, given that India is often described as the "pharmacy of the world." A robust traceability system allows fakes to be identified and removed swiftly.

### Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance

**Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** occurs when microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi evolve to resist the drugs designed to kill them, rendering standard treatments ineffective. It is driven by the misuse and overuse of antibiotics. By bringing **antimicrobials** under track-and-trace, regulators can monitor their distribution, discourage substandard products, and support the goals of the **National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance**. The World Health Organization has described AMR as one of the top global public-health threats, sometimes called a "silent pandemic."

## ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The measure reflects a shift from reactive enforcement to **preventive, data-driven regulation** of the medicine supply chain. Linking each pack to a verifiable digital identity strengthens recall capability, supports pharmacovigilance, and reinforces patient safety.

The challenge will lie in implementation: ensuring that small manufacturers can comply without prohibitive cost, that scanning infrastructure reaches rural pharmacies, and that the authentication database is secure and interoperable. Pairing traceability with antibiotic stewardship, prescription audits, and public awareness will determine whether the system meaningfully slows the rise of resistant infections.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

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**GS Paper 2:** Issues relating to development and management of the health sector; government policies and regulation.

**GS Paper 3:** Science and technology in everyday life; awareness in the field of biotechnology and public health.

**Prelims pointers:** Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Drugs Rules, 1945; track-and-trace on primary packaging; antimicrobial resistance (AMR); National Action Plan on AMR; WHO and AMR.

**Mains question:** “Antimicrobial resistance is an emerging public-health emergency. Discuss the steps India has taken, including supply-chain regulation, and suggest a comprehensive strategy to address it.” (15 marks, 250 words)

## FACTS CORNER

### FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

Governing law: Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940; Drugs Rules, 1945.

Track-and-trace: Unique barcode or QR code on the primary packaging of medicines for authentication and traceability.

Expanded categories: Vaccines, antimicrobials, and anti-cancer drugs added to the existing requirement.

AMR: Antimicrobial Resistance; microbes evolve to resist drugs due to misuse and overuse of antibiotics; a leading global public-health threat.

National Action Plan on AMR: India’s framework to contain antimicrobial resistance through stewardship and surveillance.

Regulator: Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), headed by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

*Sources: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (<https://mohfw.gov.in>), Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (<https://cdsco.gov.in>), *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com>)*

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