

Supreme Court asks 19 States, UTs to Declare Cancer 'notifiable disease' for Early Detection

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Recently, the **Supreme Court** directed the **19 remaining States and Union Territories** to consider **declaring cancer a “notifiable disease”** to ensure uniform reporting, early detection and proper care of patients. The direction came in **Anurag Srivastava v. Union of India & Ors.**, a Public Interest Litigation seeking nationwide mandatory reporting of cancer cases.

Background

The **Public Interest Litigation** (PIL) was filed by Dr. Anurag Srivastava, seeking directions to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the States/UTs to ensure uniform and mandatory reporting of cancer cases.

The petitioner invoked **Articles 14 and Article 21**, arguing that continued non-notification could result in unequal treatment of similarly situated citizens and **undermine the right to health and a life with dignity**.

Key Highlights of the Supreme Court’s Direction

During the proceedings, the Court was informed that **17 of the 36 States and UTs had already notified cancer as a notifiable disease**, following recommendations of a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

- The Court therefore **directed the remaining 19 States and UTs to consider the Committee's recommendations and take appropriate decisions.**
 - The concerned States and UTs were also **directed to file compliance affidavits on the steps taken.**
- The Bench also **questioned the Centre on why mandatory guidelines could not be issued for all States and UTs**, emphasising the need for a uniform policy.
 - The Centre responded that **health is a State subject**, highlighting the need for **Centre-State coordination.**

What Does Declaring Cancer a 'Notifiable Disease' Mean?

A **notifiable disease** is a disease whose diagnosed cases must be reported by doctors, hospitals or laboratories to designated public-health authorities.

The purpose of declaring a disease notifiable is to create a legally required reporting system so that health authorities receive timely and systematic information about diagnosed cases. This helps to:

- Monitor the disease burden and trends across regions and populations.
- Detect emerging patterns or outbreaks early, where relevant.
- Plan healthcare resources such as personnel, medicines and facilities.
- Design and target public-health interventions based on reliable data.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of health programmes and policies.

For cancer, notification is primarily aimed at systematic surveillance, reliable data collection, early detection and evidence-based cancer-control planning.

Notifiable Diseases in India

India does not have a single uniform national list of notifiable diseases. Since public health is primarily a State subject, notification requirements can vary across States and UTs.

The **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897** provides a broad legal framework for dealing with epidemic diseases, while the **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)** supports national surveillance of epidemic-prone diseases.

Commonly notified diseases include tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, dengue, measles, diphtheria, polio, rabies, typhoid and Japanese encephalitis.

Cancer Notification and the Existing Registry System

India already has the **National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP)** under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which collects cancer data through Population-Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs) and Hospital-Based Cancer Registries (HBCRs).

Mandatory notification could complement the NCRP by improving the coverage, timeliness and consistency of cancer data. The PIL also sought a centralized, real-time digital cancer registry to strengthen cancer surveillance.

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