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AIIMS experts call for earlier detection of growing GI disease burden

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World Congress of Gastroenterology 2026 comes to India as global and national burden of digestive diseases reaches a critical crossroads



The global burden of gastroenterology diseases is on the rise, and almost every third person in the world has some gastrointestinal and liver disease-related symptoms. Furthermore, every second person is infected with *Helicobacter pylori* infection and every third person is infested by worms in their intestine.

One of the biggest diseases of mankind now is fatty liver disease and every third person suffers from fatty liver disease. Gastrointestinal (GI) cancers and autoimmune diseases are on rise globally and also in India.

The discussion brought together Dr Pramod Garg, Professor & Head, Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition, AIIMS, New Delhi; President, Indian Society of Gastroenterology and Co-Chair, Steering Committee, World Congress of Gastroenterology 2026 (WCOG 2026); Dr Govind Makharia, Professor, Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition, AIIMS, New Delhi and Chairman, Local Organising Committee, WCOG 2026; Dr Shalimar, Professor, Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition Unit, AIIMS, New Delhi and Dr. Vineet Ahuja, Professor, Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition, AIIMS, New Delhi and Secretary General of Crohn's Colitis Foundation of India.

Fatty liver emerged as a key concern. An AIIMS-led systematic review and meta-analysis found the condition in 38.6 per cent of Indian adults and 35.4 per cent of Indian children. It is closely associated with diabetes, obesity and hypertension.

Yet, it can remain silent until liver damage has progressed- exemplified by a recent study which alarmingly reported that one in four patients with type 2 diabetes has clinically significant fibrosis. Recently India included fatty liver disease in its National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in 2021. Guidelines were subsequently issued for its detection at the primary-care level.

The experts also highlighted colorectal cancer as a growing concern. Cases are increasingly being seen in younger adults. India recorded 40,430 new cases among men and 24,433 among women in 2022. Blood in the stool, persistent changes in bowel habits and unexplained weight loss should not be dismissed as routine gastrointestinal problems.

Persistent infections remain another important part of India's GI disease burden. *H. pylori* remains widespread and is associated with peptic ulcer disease and gastric cancer. Worm infections continue to affect children and can contribute to anaemia and undernutrition. The experts also discussed celiac disease and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), which are increasingly being recognised in India. Community-based research led from AIIMS found celiac disease in approximately one in 96 people in northern India.

In order to highlight the burden of digestive diseases and to discuss the advancement in the strategy of early diagnosis, their treatment along, India is hosting the World Congress of Gastroenterology from September 30 through October 3, 2026 at Yashobhoomi, the India International Convention and Expo Centre, Dwarka, New Delhi.

India is hosting the World Congress of Gastroenterology for the first time in India, providing an opportunity to showcase India's scientific and clinical contributions while creating new international collaborations.

Jointly hosted by the Indian Society of Gastroenterology (ISG), the Indian National Association for the Study of the Liver (INASL), Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of India (CCFI), The Indian Pancreas Club (IPC) and the Indian Neurogastroenterology and Motility Association (INMA) in partnership with the World Gastroenterology Organisation, WCOG 2026 will bring together gastroenterology experts from around the world. The theme is "Transforming Gastrointestinal Health, Preserving Nature."

The congress will focus on advances in diagnostics, endoscopy, therapeutics, the gut microbiome and AI-enabled healthcare. It will also examine the changing global burden of gastrointestinal disease.