Sleep Study Facility and Autism Lab opened at IIT Madras

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News

Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava on 22 November 2026 inaugurated a Sleep Study Facility and an Autism Lab at IIT Madras, Chennai, and flagged off an E-cart ambulance service for the institute hospital. Housed in the Campus Health Centre, the sleep facility will offer specialised assessment, consultation and treatment of sleep disorders to students, faculty, staff and researchers, supported by specialists from Kauvery Hospitals, Chennai. With ethics approval and informed consent it will also support research on sleep patterns and work on indigenous, low-cost sleep-monitoring sensors. The Autism Lab will study 'Integrated Varmam Therapy' for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), combining traditional medical knowledge, clinical expertise and technology. It plans to work with the Paediatric Neurology team of AIIMS Jodhpur, which has given the therapy to over 800 children, to scientifically evaluate the protocol. It also plans pressure-sensing gloves that give practitioners real-time feedback and research on possible genetic, molecular and epigenetic mechanisms behind the therapy, and will contribute to IIT Madras's Centre for Indian Medical Knowledge (CIMK). She also visited the Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre, the Department of Medical Sciences and Technology (set up in 2023) and the National Cancer Tissue Biobank. The PM had dedicated the Brain Centre to the nation on 11 October 2026 and released C-STROKE, described as the world's first human ischaemic stroke atlas, with over 1,000 annotated brain sections; the Biobank, a joint initiative of the Department of Science and Technology and IIT Madras, produced the Bharat Cancer Genome Atlas, launched in February 2025.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Opened by	Punya Salila Srivastava, Union Health Secretary
Date	22 November 2026
Sleep facility	Campus Health Centre; Kauvery Hospitals specialists
Autism Lab	Study of Integrated Varmam Therapy for children with ASD
Partner	AIIMS Jodhpur paediatric neurology (800+ children)
Technology	Pressure-sensing gloves; low-cost sleep sensors
Also	Campus E-cart ambulance

Background

- Sleep has two types: non-rapid eye movement (NREM – N1, N2, N3) and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which alternate in cycles of about 90 minutes at night. The brain's 'biological clock' (circadian rhythm) sets sleep timing according to light and darkness.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition affecting social communication, language and behaviour. In India the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 recognises it as a specified disability. World Autism Awareness Day is 2 April.
- Varmam is a traditional Tamil therapy that works on vital points of the body; it is taught as the 'Varma Maruthuvam' specialty of Siddha medicine (NCISM MD Siddha syllabus).

Tamil Nadu link: The event took place in Chennai. Varmam is part of Tamil Nadu's traditional medical knowledge, which IIT Madras now seeks to evaluate scientifically. Specialists from Kauvery Hospitals, Chennai, support the sleep facility.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava on 22 November 2026 inaugurated a Sleep Study Facility and an Autism Lab at IIT Madras, Chennai, and flagged off an E-cart ambulance service for the institute hospital.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Opened by: Punya Salila Srivastava, Union Health Secretary; Date: 22 November 2026; Sleep facility: Campus Health Centre; Kauvery Hospitals specialists; Autism Lab: Study of Integrated Varmam Therapy for children with ASD.

What is the background to this news?

Sleep has two types: non-rapid eye movement (NREM – N1, N2, N3) and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which alternate in cycles of about 90 minutes at night.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. The traditional Tamil therapy 'Varmam', studied by IIT Madras's Autism Lab, is based on –

A) Herbal fumigation

B) Pressure on vital points

C) Needle insertion

D) Metal-mineral drugs

Answer: B – Explanation: Stimulating the body's varmam points by massaging, tapping and pressing; it is also linked with the martial art varma kalai. Needle insertion is acupuncture.

2. Which gland secretes melatonin, the hormone that regulates the sleep–wake cycle?

A) Thyroid

B) Pituitary

C) Pineal gland

D) Adrenal

Answer: C – Explanation: The pineal gland – it releases more melatonin in darkness; screen light at night lowers it and delays sleep.

3. The 2017 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was for discovering molecular mechanisms controlling what?

A) Circadian rhythm

B) Autophagy

C) Immune checkpoints

D) Oxygen sensing

Answer: A – Explanation: Circadian rhythm (biological clock) – Hall, Rosbash and Young. 2016: autophagy; 2018: immune checkpoints; 2019: oxygen sensing.

4. In which stage of sleep do most vivid dreams occur?

A) N1 (light sleep)

B) N2 sleep

C) N3 (deep sleep)

D) REM sleep

Answer: D – Explanation: REM (rapid eye movement) sleep – brain activity is high while the limb muscles are temporarily paralysed.

5. In the Schedule of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, 'autism spectrum disorder' is listed under which category?

A) Mental illness

B) Multiple disabilities

C) Chronic neurological conditions

D) Intellectual disability

Answer: D – Explanation: Intellectual disability – the Schedule lists 'specific learning disabilities' and 'autism spectrum disorder' under it. Mental illness, chronic neurological conditions and multiple disabilities are separate categories.