

Centre Orders 1.1 Cr Vaccine Doses of Serum Institute's 'Covishield'

First Vaccine Consignment Leaves for 13 Locations Amid Security

The process of transporting Covishield vaccine began on 11th January after Serum Institute of India (SII) received the Centre's initial purchase order for 11 million (1.1 crore) doses at Rs 200 per dose.

The first consignment of Covishield vaccines left Serum Institute of India for Pune airport, four days ahead of the nationwide inoculation drive launch.

Three temperature-controlled trucks rolled out of the Serum Institute gates shortly before 5 am and left for Pune airport, from where the vaccines will be flown across India.

The trucks carried 478 boxes of the vaccines, each box weighing 32 kg, as reported in PTL.

The locations where these Covishield vaccines will be flown from Pune include Delhi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Karnal, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Guwahati, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Bhubaneswar.

The consignment for Mumbai will leave by road. Trucks belonging to Kool-ex Cold Chain



Ltd are being used to ferry the vaccine stocks from Serum Institute.

Four More Vaccines on the Way, Says PM

In a virtual interaction with CMs and administrators of UTs ahead of the formal launch of the vaccination on January 16, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured that soon, there would be more options as four more vaccines were in progress and were likely to be available as the vaccination programme advanced to cover the next two priority groups. He said 3 crore healthcare and frontline workers would receive free vaccine on priority, while asking states to ensure that politicians and elected representatives do not get the vaccine before their turn. Modi said the priority of vaccination had been decided after consultation with states.



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, India

Health workers, from both the government and private sector, will be the first ones to receive the vaccine. Along with them, safaikarmacharis, other frontline workers such as police and paramilitary personnel, home guards, disaster management volunteers and other jawans in civil defence, and revenue officials associated with containment and surveillance will also receive the vaccine in the first stage.

The second round of immunisation will aim to cover priority population groups of those above 50 years and those below 50 years but with pre-existing diseases. The interaction also brought out the gathering worry in the government about rumours leading to fear about the vaccines.

Study Reveals Rare Deadly Fungal Infection in Eight COVID Patients in Bengaluru

A rare fungal infection was seen among eight COVID-19 patients who were admitted to the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI). Six of them died, while the other two have suffered vision loss that may be hard to reverse.

Sino-orbital invasive disease is an aggressive infection of the eye socket and sinuses, and it can prove



fatal, especially in cases where it spreads to the brain. The disease is caused by Mucormycosis, a deadly fungus.

The said eight cases were studied by researchers at the Minto Regional Institute of Ophthalmology, which is associated with BMCRI. In all, the team examined 2,684 COVID-19 patients from September 1 to November 30, 2020, with their written consent. The cohort had moderate to severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Patients with displaced eyeball, drooping upper eyelid and COVID-19 manifestations such as conjunctivitis and ocular pain were subjected to further medical investigations. Twenty-seven patients had ocular manifestations of COVID-19, but the sino-orbital invasive disease was detected in only eight patients. All eight had severe COVID-19 and diabetes.

The researchers claim that this is the first such study in the country and the findings have been sent for a peer review. Dr K Kiran Kumar, an alumnus of AIIMS Delhi and an assistant professor at Minto, led the study. Dr Kumar said that six of the eight patients had symptoms at the time of admission, while two developed symptoms after hospitalisation.

According to the researchers, there have been reports of increasing bacterial and fungal co-infections with COVID-19. "The usage of steroids in treatment of COVID-19 could be one of the risk factors, but the same cannot explain the incidence of co-infections in the patients we studied. Hence, there is a need to look for other mechanisms for this rising trend," Dr Kumar said, as reported in ET.

40 Govt and 49 Pvt Hospitals to Begin COVID Vaccination in Delhi on January 16

COVID-19 Vaccination will start in Delhi on January 16 at only 89 booths located in 40 government and 49 private hospitals. Healthcare workers will be the first to get the shots.

Among the government hospitals where the first booths have been set up are AIIMS, Safdarjung, Lok Nayak and Hindu Rao, and among the private ones are Max, Fortis, Apollo and Sir Ganga Ram. The dry run conducted, had involved 150 booths and officials say the plan is to eventually have around 1,000 vaccination points across the capital.



The reason behind starting the drive vaccination at a limited number of booths is to ensure that the government is able to effectively handle adverse situations, if any are reported, post vaccination.

Satyendar Jain, health minister said that Delhi government has prepared a robust storage system for the vaccines.

At the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital, one of the largest Delhi government hospitals at in Dilshad Garden in northeast Delhi, the vaccination storage is located in an area spread over 4,700 square feet and is divided into eight large rooms, where all the work related to laying the cold storage infrastructure was completed last week with the installation of all equipment required to ensure optimum safety of the vaccines. It has already been handed over to the health and family welfare department.

The Delhi government has earmarked an additional vaccine storage facility in Civil Lines, but officials handling the vaccination exercise said the RGSSH facility was adequate for the number of vaccines required in the capital. The Civil Lines facility will not be required, they said. The vaccines will be transported to 603 cold chain points created across 11 districts in special vans. From the cold chain points, the vaccines will be taken to the vaccination booths in vaccine carriers.

COVID Vax Drive: Anxiety and Inoculation on Empty Stomach Cause Reactions among Beneficiaries

A day after the mass COVID-19 vaccination drive, state officials on 17th January did not reveal if there had been any additions to the 22 cases of adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) reported on 16th January. However, after 18,338 healthcare workers

in Maharashtra took the vaccine, helplines across district hospitals received calls from beneficiaries complaining of fever, nausea, body pain, headache, among others.

In Mumbai, that didn't report any AEFI cases on 16th January, around 30 cases of mild fever, body-

ache and headache were brought to the notice of the civic immunisation department on 17th January. However, none were severe, officials said. A total of 447 AEFIs have been reported in the country on 16th and 17th January.

Around 201 of 3,881 healthcare workers in Vidarbha developed minor complications, of which nine required hospitalisation for high fever. Authorities said all were stable.

Three nurses in Ahmednagar were hospitalised after they complained of fever.

Several districts had cases where healthcare workers took the vaccine on an empty stomach or skipped their regular medication, giving rise to discomfort. Many had taken the shot after their day's work when they were exhausted. Solapur civil surgeon Dr Pradeep Dhele said

they had two cases where the beneficiaries had taken the vaccine without having breakfast. Kolhapur district reported the highest, five out of 22 AEFIs. Of the five, one had fever, while the remaining four complained of headache and dizziness.

Healthcare workers who got the first shot will be monitored for 48 hours from 24×7 helplines.

Centre Appoints RS Sharma to Head Empowered Panel for COVID-19 Vaccine

The Union government has appointed RS Sharma, former TRAI Chief, as the chairperson of an empowered committee for administration of COVID-19 vaccine. This has come days ahead of the mega inoculation drive is to start in India. He has also been included as a member of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of COVID-19 that was formed in August 2020 and is headed by Niti Aayog member, VK Paul.

Sharma was the first person to officially initiate a discussion on vaccination delivery in the government in the summer of 2020 when COVID-19 cases peaked.

A ten-member team has been constituted to be headed by Sharma. Top health ministry and UIDAI officials are part of the empowered committee. According to a government notification, the panel can invite eminent persons as and when required to ensure delivery of the vaccine through the Co-Win technology platform.



RS Sharma

India Reports 447 Adverse Events During First Two Days of Vaccination Drive

A total of 447 adverse events following immunisation against COVID-19 were reported during the first two days of the vaccination drive, which began on 16th January. While only three cases were initially hospitalised, two have already been discharged from AIIMS, New Delhi, and the Northern Railway Hospital, respectively, the health ministry said. "One case is still under observation in AIIMS Rishikesh and is fine," additional health secretary Manohar Agnani said.

Most of the adverse events reported so far are minor like fever, pain, headache, nau-sea, giddiness and mild allergic reactions like rashes etc. "Protocols are in place for reporting, immediate case management at vaccination session site, transportation and hospitalisation and further care of such cases. Protocols are in place for systematic investigation and causality assessment of serious AEFIs," Agnani said. A worker in AIIMS was hospitalised after he developed an allergic reaction after getting a Covaxin shot on 16th January.

India will Supply Covaxin and Covishield to Other Nations

As a goodwill gesture, India will be sending Serum Institute of India (SII)'s Covishield and the indigenous Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech to friendly nations.

The Union Ministers for health and external affairs, representatives of the department of pharmaceuticals and executives from Bharat Biotech and SII met in Delhi on 18th January to discuss supply of vaccines outside India.

India has decided to export 8.1 lakh doses of Covaxin to Oman, Mongolia, Myanmar, Bahrain, Mauritius, the Philippines and the Maldives.

Serum would supply a few lakh doses of Covishield to the Seychelles, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, the report added.

Serum has apparently allotted 25 million doses for exports.

Before the vaccines can be supplied, all these countries need regulatory dossiers to be approved by their own authorities.

Both Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India

have also separately signed deals with foreign countries to supply vaccines.

Serum has signed a deal with South Africa to supply 1.5 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines. Bharat Biotech has a deal with Brazil's association of private health clinics to supply its Covaxin.

Biden Appoints Indian-American Vidur Sharma as Policy Advisor for Testing in COVID-19 Response Team

US President-elect Joe Biden has named Indian-American health policy expert Vidur Sharma as testing advisor in his COVID-19 Response Team.

Biden announced the appointment of Sharma as Policy Advisor for Testing on 15th January along with additional members of the White House COVID-19 Response Team.

During the Obama administration, Sharma served as a health policy advisor on the Domestic Policy Council.

Sharma supported the imple-



Vidur Sharma

mentation of the Affordable Care Act, aligned Federal Department and Agencies, and collaborated with community stakeholders to further the administration's health

policy agenda.

He also served as Deputy Research Director with Protect Our Care, a coalition of advocacy organisations dedicated to preventing the repeal of the ACA. Since then, Sharma has advised health sector organisations on value-based care arrangements at PwC Strategy.

Born in Wisconsin and raised in Minnesota, and the son of Indian immigrants, Sharma is a graduate of Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Saint Louis University.

WHO Warns of No Herd Immunity in 2021 Despite Mass Vaccination

Scientists at the World Health Organization warned on 11th January that mass vaccinations would not bring about herd immunity to the coronavirus this year, even as one leading producer boosted its production forecast.

England meanwhile launched the first of its mass-inoculation sites in major cities, racing to get ahead of the rapid spread of a new strain of the disease there.

The pandemic has infected more than 90 million people and the death toll has passed 1.94 million since China confirmed the first death in the central city of Wuhan a year ago.

China has largely brought the virus under control, but is tackling a number of local infections.

Infection numbers were, however, surging across Europe, particularly as Britain coped with a new strain of the disease that could see hospitals being overwhelmed.

Russia on 10th January confirmed its first case of the new UK coronavirus strain, which scientists fear is significantly more contagious.



The virus has also exploded across the United States, the hardest-hit country, where US President-elect Joe Biden publicly received his second dose of the vaccine.

Later on 11th January, the WHO's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan warned it would take time to produce and administer enough vaccine doses to halt the spread of the virus.

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