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THE HINDU

Women's participation critical for eliminating TB, says official

CHENNAI, DECEMBER 22, 2021 01:12 ist



Event held to mark culmination of initiative to engage women as TB leaders

At an event to mark the culmination of *Saadhikka Vaa Penne*, a two-year-long effort to engage women as TB (Tuberculosis) leaders in four districts of Tamil Nadu, Manish Narnaware, Deputy Commissioner (Health), Greater Chennai Corporation, highlighted the need for women's participation in the elimination of the disease.

"Women's participation is critical if we are to eliminate TB. We must create more leadership opportunities like this," he said, according to a press release.

He added that *Saadhikka Vaa Penne* was a model for not just increasing case-finding for TB, but also for improving women's participation in health. This was an initiative of REACH (Research Group for Education and Advocacy for Community

THE HINDU

Covaxin cleared for those above 12

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25, 2021 23:40 IST

This makes it the second vaccine approved for use in India in those below 18 years.



Bharat Biotech, the makers of Covaxin, said the vaccine was "formulated uniquely" so that the same dosage administered to adults could be used in children as well. File | Photo Credit: Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

Covaxin has been approved for use in those aged 12 and above by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI). This would make it the second vaccine approved for use in India in those below 18.

The Hindu has seen a letter by V. Somani, DCGI, according approval for the vaccine as two doses, four weeks apart....

Continued in page no.5

Health), a non-profit organisation.

Ranjani Ramachandran, national professional officer, World Health Organisation, said she was happy to meet the empowered group of women from the community who were committed to helping people with TB and this work must be expanded and sustained across the State and country.

An impact report describing the results of the initiative was released. As per the report, over 200 women TB leaders were trained and engaged to work at over 180 health facilities in the State and around 1,200 women were equipped with information on health through audio-based modules. As many as 14 lakh persons were screened for symptoms and 84,000 persons were identified with symptoms. Around 77% were supported with tests for TB diagnosis and over 2,900 persons were diagnosed with TB.

A coffee table book *Saadhikka Vaa Penne* featuring women TB leaders was released. Ramya Ananthakrishnan, director of REACH said the women continued to work during the pandemic and supported people with TB and symptoms of TB at every step of their journey. The women TB leaders from Vellore, Villupuram, Salem and Tirunelveli were congratulated for their achievements, the release said. In a video message from Geneva, Lucica Ditiu, executive director of Stop TB Partnership said it was critical to ensure that there were enough people in the communities to provide care, advice, information and support to people affected by TB, COVID-19 and other airborne diseases.

THE  HINDU

NIV accreditation soon for T.N.'s testing facility for Omicron

VELLORE, DECEMBER 23, 2021 00:55 IST

Samples tested now in Chennai are sent to NIV, Pune, for re-testing

The Pune-based National Institute for Virology (NIV) will give its accreditation to the testing facility for Omicron variant in Tamil Nadu soon, Health Secretary J. Radhakrishnan said here on Wednesday.

Addressing mediapersons after flagging off a COVID-19 awareness rally at the Old Bus Terminus, he said the accreditation process for the existing testing facility for Omicron variant at the DMS (Directorate of Medical Services) complex in Chennai, was in the final stages of approval by the NIV.

"Currently, the samples of Omicron variants that are tested at the DMS facility are sent to NIV for re-testing. Accreditation helps to acknowledge results of tested samples at the DMS facility by NIV. The facility will be a branch of NIV for testing samples for the Omicron variant," Mr. Radhakrishnan said.

"There is no need to panic about Omicron. However, complete vaccination is the need of the hour," he said. Christmas and New Year celebrations were allowed based on the guidelines issued by the Union government. However, COVID-19 safety norms would be followed strictly, he added.

He was accompanied by P. Kumaravel Pandian, Vellore Collector, T. Manivannan, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Vellore City Corporation, and P.G. Banumathi, Deputy Director for Health Services (Vellore).

THE  HINDU

Tamil Nadu's 85.71% population gets first dose of COVID-19 vaccine

CHENNAI, DECEMBER 27, 2021 00:53 IST

17,31,277 people vaccinated at the 16th mega camp: Health Minister Ma. Subramanian

At the end of the 16th mega vaccination camp on Sunday, 85.71% of Tamil Nadu's population received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 57.85% received the second dose, Health Minister Ma. Subramanian said.

A total of 17,31,277 people were vaccinated on Sunday, including 5,17,126 persons who received their first dose and 12,14,151 persons who got their second dose. So far, 8,31,92,973 persons have been inoculated. They include 4,96,48,907, who received the first dose, and 3,35,44,066 persons, who got their second dose.

The Minister said that between May 7 and December 25, 31,068 persons had benefited from the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. A sum of ₹182.64 crore had been allocated for RT-PCR tests, and this measure helped 32,23,064 persons. A team of experts, including epidemiologists and scientists, would visit health facilities to assess the State's preparedness to tackle the infection.

Launching the camp in the city earlier in the day, the Minister said the State had a population of 33,20,000 persons aged 15-18. As per the Union government's advisory, they would be administered the vaccine from January 3. Around nine lakh frontline workers would also receive their booster dose, he said.

Mr. Subramanian said that as on Sunday, only 16 persons were under treatment for the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus in the State. The State had 34 cases of the variant, and 22 patients were treated and discharged.

More, and for more: On COVID-19 vaccines for children and boosters for the aged

DECEMBER 27, 2021 00:02 IST

Boosters for the aged and vaccines for children can help India combat the virus



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, not unlike a Santa Claus who enters homes without warning and leaves gifts, suddenly [announced on Christmas night](#) that 'precaution' or third doses of vaccine would be available from January 10 for health-care, frontline workers, and those over 60 with co-morbidities on their doctors' advice. Vaccines would also be available for those in the 15-18 age group from January 3. Since the emergence of Omicron, there has been a clamour among senior citizens for booster shots. The announcement, however, was nearly simultaneous with another significant development: of [Covaxin being approved by the Drugs Controller General of India for use in those over 12 years](#). This would make it the second vaccine after [ZyCov-D](#) (which has still to hit the market) to be approved in the 12-plus years category. There are close to 44 crore Indians below 18, a third of whom are 12-17 years old. The experience with Covaxin has shown that despite approval on the same day as Covishield this January, it has been extremely slow to scale up, with the two-dose vaccine only accounting

for about 10% of the nearly 141 crore doses that have been administered so far. Given that ZyCov-D's output is unknown, it is unclear if it will be practically available in January 2022.

However, the Prime Minister's impromptu announcement is also puzzling. For more than a month, a National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation in India committee has reportedly been weighing the pros and cons of approving vaccines for children and senior citizens. Just a day before Mr. Modi's announcement, the ICMR head had said that this matter was still under debate in India's medico-bureaucratic hierarchy. These included key questions on the extent to which antibody levels waxed or waned following immunisation, whether booster doses of the same vaccine would be effective, and whether Covaxin and Covishield were differentially protective against Omicron. On the latter point, it was said that the ICMR awaited data as the Omicron variant had not yet been artificially grown in its labs. These questions have public health consequences. While 90% of adults have got one dose and over 70% Indians have been exposed to the virus in the past 20 months, there are 40% adults who have not got a second shot. The demand for first shots is nosediving and with private hospitals claiming excess stocks, it is very likely that the economic elite of India and their adolescents will mop up available stocks. Also unusual is that the technical clearance for vaccines is for those 12 and above, but Mr. Modi announced these will be for those above 15 years. It is not clear if there is evidence that this group of sub-adults is more vulnerable. India's health administration should be transparent with the data at hand and not let itself be in thrall of political calculations.

Govt's decision on COVID-19 vaccination for children 'unscientific', says senior epidemiologist

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 26, 2021 15:01 IST

Few countries, including the U.S., started vaccinating children four-five months ago. The data of these countries should be analysed before initiating.



A medic prepares a dose of Covaxin at a hospital in Lucknow. | Photo Credit: Sandeep Saxena

A senior epidemiologist at AIIMS who is the [principal investigator of Covaxin trials](#) for adults and children at the institute on Sunday termed the Centre's decision to vaccinate children against [COVID-19](#) "unscientific" and said it will not yield any additional benefit.

Dr Sanjay K Rai, who is also the president of the Indian Public Health Association, said before implementing the decision, data from countries that have already started vaccinating children should be analysed.

In an address to the [nation on Saturday night](#), [Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) announced that vaccination against COVID-19 for children in the 15 to 18 age group will start from January 3.

This will reduce the worries of children going to schools and colleges and their parents, and boost the fight against the pandemic, he said, adding that the move is also likely to aid in normalisation of teaching in schools.

"I am a great fan of PM Modi for his selfless service to nation and taking right decisions at right time. But I am completely disappointed with his unscientific decision on children vaccination," Dr. Rai said in a tweet tagging the Prime Minister's Office.

Elaborating his viewpoint, Dr. Rai said there should be a clear-cut objective of any intervention. The objective is to either prevent coronavirus infection or severity or death.

"But according to whatever knowledge we have about vaccines, they are unable to make a significant dent in the infection. In some countries, people are getting infected even after taking booster shots.

"Also, 50,000 breakthrough infections are being reported per day in the UK. So this proves that vaccination is not preventing coronavirus infection but vaccines are effective in preventing severity and death," Dr. Rai told *PTI*.

He said mortality due to COVID-19 in susceptible populations is around 1.5 %, which means 15,000 deaths per million population.

"Through vaccination, we can prevent 80-90 per cent of these deaths, which means that 13,000 to 14,000 deaths per million (population) can be prevented," he added.

Serious adverse events following immunisation are between 10 to 15 per million population, Rai said.

"So, if you do the risk and benefit analysis in adults, it is a huge benefit," he said.

In the case of children, he said, the severity of infection is very low and according to data available in the public domain, only two deaths per million population have been reported.

"In this section (children), 15,000 (people) are not dying and keeping in mind the adverse effects also, if you do the risk and benefit analysis, then the risk is more than the benefits based on the available data," Dr. Rai explained.

"Both the objectives are not being fulfilled by initiating vaccination among children," he said.

Few countries, including the U.S., started vaccinating children four-five months ago. The data of these countries should be analysed before initiating COVID-19 vaccination for children, he said.

Continued from page no.1

Covaxin cleared for those above 12

.....The DCGI in August [granted emergency approval to Zycov-D](#), a three-dose, DNA COVID-19 vaccine developed by the Ahmedabad-based Zydus Cadilla Group, making it the first vaccine in India that could be administered to adults and those 12 and above. The company has said it can make one crore vaccines a month. Covaxin constitutes about 10% of the nearly 140 crore doses administered in India. A company spokesperson told *The Hindu* that about 55 million doses were produced in November and the company was on track to make a billion doses annually in 2022.

Welcoming the clearance, Bharat Biotech, the makers of Covaxin, said the vaccine Covaxin was "formulated uniquely" so that the same

dosage administered to adults could be used in children as well.

Their statement noted: "COVAXIN has established a proven record for safety and efficacy in adults for the original variant and subsequent. We look forward for COVAXIN to provide similar levels of protection for adults and children alike."

Chairman and managing director of Bharat Biotech International Limited, Krishna Ella, had said on September 21 that trials for "paediatric Covaxin" had been completed in about 1,000 volunteers aged 2-18 years and the data submitted to the Drugs Controller for evaluation.

There is no efficacy data made public yet for the vaccine and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation has not clarified on why only those above 12 years have been approved for the vaccine despite trials including those below 12 years. There is debate among vaccinologists and public health experts on the use of the vaccine in those below 18 years because have been concerns that the vaccines, if approved for them, would be diverted away from adults who are yet to receive their first and second doses.

"The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 and the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation are deliberating and considering scientific evidences related to vaccination of children below 18 years of age," the Rajya Sabha was told by the Centre on December 21.

India has inoculated about 89% of the adults with at least one dose. Those below 18 years form a sizeable 40 crore population and while the current evidence suggests that children are less likely to be ill with the infection, they can be as easily infected and as contagious as adults. The rapid rise in instances of the Omicron variant in India has led to the worry that a future wave is imminent and several States have imposed movement restrictions.

All vaccines globally have shown to produce fewer antibodies against the Omicron variant, seeding the demand for booster doses.



First precautionary dose for those who received 2nd shot 9 months ago, CoWIN chief confirms

This would mean that the first lot of recipients of the precautionary vaccine will be those who received their second shot by April this year.

By: [Express Web Desk](#) | New Delhi |
December 27, 2021 1:15:37 pm



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to a beneficiary at a government hospital amid fear of spread of 'Omicron variant' in Bengaluru, Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. (PTI Photo)

The [first precautionary dose of the Covid vaccine](#) will be given to those above 60 years of age who received their second dose of the vaccine nine months before registering for the third. The process of registration will be exactly the same, Dr RS Sharma, CoWIN platform Chief told ANI.

This would mean that the first lot of recipients of the precautionary vaccine will be those who received their second shot by April this year.

The [decision to keep the interval between the second and third doses](#) at nine months has been based on the findings of five scientific studies carried out by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad, top government sources who were part of the deliberations, told [The Indian Express](#).

Sharma also said that children between the ages of 15 and 18 will be [able to register on the CoWIN platform from January 1](#). For registering, children have been permitted to use their student ID cards in case they do not have [Aadhaar](#) or any other identity cards, CoWIN platform Chief Dr RS Sharma told ANI.

The announcement comes days after PM Modi's Christmas night address, where he said that frontline workers as well as those above the age of 60 who have comorbidities will soon be eligible for a third 'precautionary' or booster dose of the vaccine

The Indian EXPRESS

Consider imposing need-based restrictions, home ministry to states on Covid-19 surge amid Omicron threat

State governments should ensure that oxygen supply equipment are fully functional and maintain a buffer stock of essential drugs, Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote in a letter sent to chief secretaries of all states.

By: [Express News Service](#) | New Delhi |
Updated: December 27, 2021 2:38:24 pm

In view of a surge in [Covid-19](#) cases in the country and the emergence of [Omicron](#), the

new variant of [coronavirus](#), the Ministry of Home Affairs has asked all states and union territories to impose "need-based" restrictions on public movement during the festive season and implement directions issued by the health ministry to contain the pandemic.



Crowd seen at Sarojini Nagar market in New Delhi, on Saturday. (Express Photo by Praveen Khanna)

The home ministry has also issued statutory orders under the Disaster Management Act for the implementation of directions issued by the health ministry.

"The country has witnessed an overall decline in active cases. However, the new variant, Omicron ...is reported to be at least 3 times more transmissible than the Delta VoC (variant of concern), and is posing a new challenge for the Covid containment measures. In the countries with Omicron-driven surge, the growth trajectory of cases has been very steep. In our country, 578 Omicron cases have already been reported in 19 states/UTs," Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote in a letter sent to chief secretaries of all states.

The letter said that the health ministry had on December 21 issued an advisory detailing a normative framework for containment of Covid-19 and with the emergence of Omicron, there is a need for "greater foresight, data analysis, dynamic decision making, and strict and prompt containment actions at the local and district levels".

Explained: How can I protect a child too young for a Covid-19 vaccine?

In the US, children ages 5 to 11 can get kid-size doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. The company is testing an even smaller dose for babies and preschoolers.

By: [AP](#) |

Updated: December 27, 2021 12:52:57 pm



The CDC recommends that anyone who's not vaccinated – including children ages 2 and older – wear masks indoors in public. (AP Photo)

Children younger than 5 can't get [COVID-19](#) vaccines in the U.S. yet, but there are steps you can take to protect them from infection over the holidays.

“Surround them with adults and siblings who are vaccinated, boosted if eligible,” advises Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

She also encourages taking COVID-19 home tests before gatherings.

The CDC recommends that anyone who's not vaccinated – including children ages 2 and older – wear masks indoors in public. If your child is younger than 2 — or cannot wear a mask for other reasons — the agency suggests limiting visits with unvaccinated people. And it says to

“State governments should ensure that the health systems in the states are strengthened to meet any challenge posed by the new variant. Further, the state governments/UT administrations should ensure that oxygen supply equipment are installed and are fully functional and the buffer stock of essential drugs should also be maintained,” the letter said.

The letter said Omicron cases have been detected in 116 countries and a surge has been reported in places such as the US, the UK, Europe (France, Italy, Spain), Russia, South Africa, Vietnam, Australia, etc.

“I would like to reiterate that all the states/UTs must observe all precautions, and not let the guard down. Local/district administration, based on the normative framework and assessment of the situation, should promptly take appropriate containment measures. States may consider imposing need-based, local curbs/restrictions, to control the crowd during the festive season,” Bhalla wrote in the letter.

The letter further stressed on continued focus on the five-fold strategy of test-track-treat-vaccination and adherence to Covid-appropriate Behaviour.

“The state enforcement machinery should strictly enforce the norms of Covid-appropriate behaviour, i.e., wearing of face masks and maintaining safe [social distancing](#) in all public areas/ gatherings,” it said.

The letter also asked states to discourage any misinformation concerning Omicron to avoid anxiety among the public. “All states and UTs should proactively and regularly hold media briefings at the highest level to disseminate the right information to them. States/UTs should also educate them about various preventive measures undertaken by them and also advise them to strictly follow Covid- appropriate behaviour,” the letter said.

keep a distance between the child and others in public places.

Adults might also opt to wear a mask indoors in public to set an example for young children, the CDC says. But in virus hot spots, it says everyone should wear masks in those settings, regardless of whether they're vaccinated.

Matthew Binnicker, an expert in viral infections at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, says it might be a good idea to have everyone masked at family gatherings if unvaccinated children are present, since there's still a chance vaccinated adults can spread the virus.

He also suggests limiting gatherings to 10 people or less.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, says family get-togethers shouldn't be confused with "parties with 30, 40, 50 people" where you don't know who is vaccinated.

"Those are the kind of functions — in the context of COVID and particularly in the context of [omicron](#) — that you do not want to go to," he says.

In the U.S., children ages 5 to 11 can get kid-size doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. The company is testing an even smaller dose for babies and preschoolers.



Cases in China hit recent high, many kids hospitalised in NY

Almost all the new cases were from the northwestern Shaanxi province, whose main city

Xi'an was put under lockdown last week following the detection of over 120 cases there.

Written by [Amitabh Sinha](#) | Pune |
December 27, 2021 5:17:16 am



Queue for Covid-19 testing in Times Square, New York on Sunday. (Reuters)

China detected more than 150 new [coronavirus](#) infections on Saturday, the highest daily count since the middle of June, Bloomberg reported. Almost all the new cases were from the northwestern Shaanxi province, whose main city Xi'an was put under lockdown last week following the detection of over 120 cases there.

It was not clear whether any of these infections were caused by the [Omicron](#) variant. China has been reporting very few cases, mostly in single or double digits and sometimes none, for the last 18 months. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), China has recorded only about 1.3 lakh infections till now. More than 80,000 of those cases were detected by the first week of March 2020, after which there was a dramatic decline.

The next biggest wave experienced by China was in May this year, when about 500-600 cases were detected for a few days, according to WHO data.

Fresh restrictions

The spread of Omicron continued unabated in the US and most parts of Europe. Fresh restrictions

came into force in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland from Sunday, Sky News reported. Similar post-Christmas restrictions were announced earlier by Germany and Portugal as well. In [England](#), a decision on more restrictions is expected on Monday.

The New York Times reported a jump in hospitalisation of children infected with coronavirus. Between December 5 and now, there was a fourfold increase in the hospitalisation of children in New York where the Omicron variant is spreading rapidly, it said, adding that the New York State Department of Health had appealed to parents to get their children above five vaccinated.



Decisions on booster shots, vaccinating 15 to 18-year-olds, are welcome

The Hyderabad-based company's performance during the inoculation project for adults — it complained of production constraints several times in the past six months — should be a cause of concern.

By: [Editorial](#) |

Updated: December 27, 2021 8:50:35 am



A large section of experts believes that a mix-and-match

approach to vaccination is better for shoring up immunity compared to an additional jab of the vaccine administered in the primary phase of inoculation.

India will begin 2022 with a new phase of Covid inoculation. On December 25, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced](#) that vaccination for children in the age group of 15-18 years will begin from January 3. Booster doses — PM Modi described them as precautionary shots — will be administered to healthcare professionals, frontline workers, and senior citizens with co-morbidities from January 10. While the decision on vaccines for children has been on the cards for about two months, the emergence of the [Omicron](#) variant of the [coronavirus](#) seems to have lent greater urgency to the government's efforts to introduce booster shots. ICMR's real-time tracker shows that breakthrough infections are less than 2 per cent in the general population and around 7 per cent in frontline workers. However, studies point to waning immunity after eight to nine months of receiving the second shot. And Omicron appears to have made the case for boosters even stronger with preliminary data indicating that the variant has evaded vaccine-induced immunity in 50 per cent of those it has infected in India. The highly contagious nature of the variant also increases the risk of infection in the unvaccinated younger population. The decision to broaden the ambit of the inoculation project is, therefore, welcome.

A large section of experts believes that a mix-and-match approach to vaccination is better for shoring up immunity compared to an additional jab of the vaccine administered in the primary phase of inoculation. In India, too, there is preliminary consensus that booster recipients shouldn't receive a third dose of Covishield or [Covaxin](#). The country is well placed to meet this challenge. The government has made advance payments to the Hyderabad-based Biological E to reserve 30 crore doses of the [Corbevax](#) vaccine. The jab that teaches the immune system to make antibodies using spike

proteins has been heralded as a stronger shield against variants such as Omicron compared to viral vector vaccines such as Covishield and Covaxin. Covovax, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India under licence from the US-based Novovax, also uses a protein-based platform. Though these vaccines take more time to develop, they are more affordable, and their production is easier to scale up. The SII-manufactured vaccine has already received an Emergency Use Approval from regulatory authorities in Southeast Asia and the WHO. The Drugs Controller General of India has, reportedly, asked the Pune-based company for more data over its EUA application for Covovax. The regulator's doubts must be cleared urgently to enable a decision on the most effective booster.

In October, the DCGI gave an EUA to Zydus Cadila's vaccine for children above the age of 12. On December 25, a few hours before the PM's speech, the regulator approved the use of Bharat-Biotech's Covaxin for the young population. But the Hyderabad-based company's performance during the inoculation project for adults — it complained of production constraints several times in the past six months — should be a cause of concern. There is no time to lose in sorting out such sticky matters.



Omicron in India: States that have imposed restrictions so far

Till now, 422 Omicron cases have been reported across 17 states and Union Territories. Take a look at states that have introduced restrictions as a precautionary measure.

By: [Express Web Desk](#) | New Delhi |
Updated: December 27, 2021 6:30:00 am



Health care workers conducting tests in Bangalore, India. (File)

As cases of the highly contagious [Omicron variant continue to rise across the nation](#), several states are bringing back curbs as a precautionary measure.

Till now, 422 [Omicron](#) cases have been reported across 17 states and Union Territories, of which 130 people have recovered. Maharashtra has the highest number of new variant cases, at 108, followed by Delhi at 76, Gujarat 43, Telangana 41, Kerala 38 and Tamil Nadu 34.

The Union Health Ministry has asked states to ensure stringent implementation of [Covid-19](#) protocols and urged citizens to not lower their guard, especially during the festive season. It also stated that the world is witnessing a fourth surge of Covid cases.

Here's a list of states that have introduced restrictions amid rising Omicron cases

Karnataka

The Karnataka government on Sunday [decided to impose "night curfew"](#) for 10 days from December 28, between 10 pm to 5 am. The government has also announced restrictions for New Year related parties and gatherings.

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said, "There will be no functions, parties in the external premises, especially for those celebrating with DJs and large gatherings, they have been completely banned in Karnataka." Places like eateries,

hotels, pubs and restaurants can have 50 per cent of the seating capacity of the premises.

Haryana

The Haryana government has [imposed a night curfew](#) in the state from 11 pm to 5 am, while also prohibiting the gathering of more than 200 persons in public places, as well as other programmes, till further notice.

Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday chaired a meeting to review Covid preparedness in the state. He said, "In order to curb the influence of Omicron, it is necessary that people should be made more aware. Special attention should be paid to ensure vaccination is done for everyone. Wherever necessary, essential arrangements should be ensured."

On December 23, more than two lakh people got their second dose of the Covid vaccine. "Apart from this, 30,000-32,000 people are being tested daily by the department and the samples of those being found positive are being sent for genome sequencing," Khattar added.

Maharashtra

Reporting the highest number of Omicron cases, the state government has banned the assembly of more than five people in public places between 9 pm to 6 am and restricted the number of people allowed at public functions.

In the new guidelines, only 100 people are allowed in indoor weddings and not more than 250 in outdoor weddings. Gyms, spas, hotels, theatres and cinema halls in the state can only allow 50 per cent of the full capacity.

The imposition of a fresh lockdown in the [state will be considered](#) only if the daily demand for medical oxygen touches 800 metric tonne, Public Health Minister Rajesh Tope said on Saturday.



People wearing face masks visit a church to celebrate Christmas in Kolkata. (PTI)

Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh [imposed a night curfew](#) from 11 pm to 5 am in the state. Besides the curfew, other Covid-related protocols and restrictions would also come into place, including a ban on gatherings of more than 200 people.

The government has also ordered a special drive at marketplaces to spread the message: "Mask nahi, toh saman nahi" (no selling products to people without masks).

Delhi

With the Covid positivity rate crossing the 0.5 per cent mark on Sunday, the [Delhi government announced a night curfew](#) in the city from Monday between 11 pm and 5 am. The government has banned all events or gatherings to celebrate Christmas or New Year in the city. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) as per its order dated December 15, all social, political, sports, entertainment, cultural and religious events are prohibited and no gatherings can be held.

Authorities have also started conducting raids at bars and restaurants flouting norms.

Gujarat

The Gujarat government [announced on December 20](#) to continue with the existing night curfew hours from 1 am to 5 am until December

31. A circular issued by the home department said that the decision comes in light of the “present Covid-19 situation in the state”. The night curfew is for 8 districts reporting cases.



Crowded Sarojini Nagar market amid rising cases of Omicron variant of COVID-19, in New Delhi, Thursday, Dec 23, 2021. (PTI Photo/Kamal Kishore)

The variant has so far been detected in nine districts in the state including Porbandar, Jamnagar city and Ahmedabad city.

Madhya Pradesh

Amid growing concern over the new [coronavirus](#) variant Omicron, the Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday imposed a night curfew in the state from 11 pm to 5 am as a precautionary measure and advised people to strictly follow Covid-19 protocols.

Tamil Nadu

Chief Minister M K Stalin Friday chaired a high-level consultative meeting with medical, public health experts and top officials at the secretariat to take stock of the Covid-19 situation in the state.

The Chief Minister said that all shops, commercial complexes and cinemas [should compulsorily follow guidelines](#) to prevent the virus spread and adhere to the Standard Operating Procedure. Stalin appealed to the people to avoid gathering in large numbers. People should follow

guidelines like wearing masks and maintaining social distance, he said.



Beneficiaries wait to receive a dose of COVID-19 vaccine at a government hospital amid fear of spread of 'Omicron variant' in Bengaluru, Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. (PTI Photo)

West Bengal

The West Bengal government had extended its covid restrictions till December 15 and decided to keep prevailing night curfew hours from 11 pm to 5 am unchanged. However, essential services will be exempted from the curfew.

Jammu and Kashmir

In view of the recent upsurge in cases, the UT Administration has decided to conduct Rapid Antigen Test of all passengers travelling to J&K by road. The test will be conducted at Lakanpur, the entry point to J&K from Punjab, and at least 33 per cent of incoming travellers will have to undergo RTPCR test, according to an order issued on Thursday by Kathua Deputy Commissioner Rahul Yadav.



In January, shots for 15-18, boosters for elderly, healthcare staff: PM Modi

Amid fears over the spread of the Omicron variant, the Prime Minister, while telling the

public not to panic and not to give up the practice of wearing masks and washing hands, listed the three priority groups for the “precautionary dose”.

Written by [Kaunain Sheriff M](#) | New Delhi |
Updated: December 26, 2021 7:01:33 am



Children Coronavirus Vaccination, Children Covid-19 Vaccination News: People receive shots of a Covid-19 vaccine during a special immunisation drive in East Delhi on Saturday. (Express Photo: Amit Mehra)

In a surprise address to the nation on Christmas night, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) announced that [Covid-19](#) vaccination will start January 3 onward for children in the 15-18 age group, while healthcare and frontline workers will be administered a [booster](#) — he called it “precaution dose” — from January 10.

The [“precaution dose”](#) option, he said, will also be available from January 10 for citizens above the age of 60 with co-morbidities. They can take this shot on the advice of their doctors.

Amid fears over the [spread of the Omicron variant](#), the Prime Minister, while telling the public not to panic and not to give up the practice of wearing masks and washing hands, listed the three priority groups for the “precautionary dose”, less than a year after the country rolled out its Covid-19 immunisation programme.

According to official estimates, there will be approximately 10 crore children in the 15-18 age group eligible for the Covid-19 vaccination. As of

Saturday, 12.04 crore people over the age of 60 had received their first dose of vaccine; and 9.21 crore were fully vaccinated. Official data also showed that 1.03 crore healthcare workers had received their first dose, and 96 lakh were fully vaccinated; 1.83 crore frontline workers had received their first dose, and 1.68 crore were fully vaccinated.

“Today is also the birth anniversary of Atalji (former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee). We are also celebrating Christmas. So I thought I should share this decision today. Covid-19 vaccination will be introduced for all children in the age group 15-18 years. From January 3, 2022, we will start this drive. This decision will further strengthen our fight against the pandemic. Parents have been worrying about children returning to schools and colleges. This decision will help reduce their stress,” Modi said.

The announcement came hours after the country's drug regulator granted emergency use authorisation (EUA) to [Covaxin](#) for vaccinating children in the 12-18 age group. With this approval, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin becomes the second vaccine to receive an EUA for the 12-18 age group — the drug regulator had [earlier approved Zydus Cadila's DNA Covid-19 vaccine](#) for children above the age of 12.

The Prime Minister also said India will soon introduce a nasal Covid-19 vaccine and DNA vaccine.

He said the decision on “precaution dose” will strengthen confidence of health care workers and frontline workers. “It is our experience that Corona warriors — the healthcare and frontline workers — have played the most significant role in our fight against the pandemic. Even today, they are spending an immense amount of time treating Covid-19 patients. Which is why, as a precautionary measure, the government has taken a decision that a precaution dose will be

started for healthcare and frontline workers. This will begin from January 10, 2022," he said.

Elderly citizens with associated comorbidities, he said, can avail the "precautionary dose" based on the recommendations of their treating physicians. "It is also our experience from the vaccination drive that the elderly and those who have serious comorbidities should take the extra precaution. Keeping this in mind, for those above the age of 60 years and with associated comorbidities, based on the recommendation of their doctors, precautionary vaccine dose will be made available to them. This also will start from January 10," he said.

Modi underlined that decisions on prioritisation of vaccination have been taken on the basis of scientific recommendation from the experts.

"We all know that the pandemic is not yet over. In these circumstances, we have to remain vigilant. We have continuously worked towards keeping the country and citizens safe. We started the vaccination drive based on scientific recommendations: who should receive the first dose on priority; what should be the gap between two doses; when should recovered Covid-19 patients receive their dose; and when should comorbid patients receive the vaccine. We have continuously taken these decisions that have been beneficial and helped us bring the situation under control," he said.

"India has taken the decision based on its own situation. We have taken these decisions purely on the basis of the advice of India's scientific community. At present, there is a lot of discussion on Omicron. The experiences are different in different parts of the world. The Indian scientific community is keeping a very close watch on these developments. We have completed 11 months since we launched the vaccination drive. They have examined the facts in totality, and learning from the global experience, they have made some decisions today," he said.

The Prime Minister urged people not to panic and adhere to precautions in the backdrop of emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant. "I have one request: please don't spread rumours and fear. Please avoid those who are trying to spread fear. The country, together, has run the world's largest vaccination drive. In the future, we need to further accelerate it. Our collective efforts will help strengthen the fight against the pandemic," he said.

"In India, many people have been detected with Omicron. I would urge you all not to panic; you have to be careful and alert. Remember these things: wear the mask, and wash hands regularly. The global experience so far shows that following Covid-19 appropriate guidelines at an individual level is the greatest weapon to combat the infection," he said.

The Prime Minister said that today, as the virus is mutating, "our capability and confidence to face the challenge is also multiplying along with our innovative spirit". He said the country has 18 lakh isolation beds, 5 lakh oxygen-supported beds, 1.4 lakh ICU beds, 90000 ICU and non-ICU beds specially for children, more than 3000 PSA oxygen plants, 4 lakh oxygen cylinders. He said support to states is being provided for buffer doses and testing.



Explained: What Covid-19 therapies are available in US?

The drugs from Pfizer and Merck join a handful of other therapies that have been shown to blunt the worst effects of the virus.

By: [AP](#) | Updated: December 25, 2021 12:48:50 pm



The Food and Drug Administration authorized Pfizer's Paxlovid on Wednesday and Merck's molnupiravir on Thursday.

The US recently added two new weapons to its small arsenal against the [coronavirus](#): pills that patients can take at home to treat [COVID-19](#).

The drugs from Pfizer and Merck join a handful of other therapies that have been shown to blunt the worst effects of the virus. But each treatment has different advantages and tends to work best for certain types of patients at different stages of the disease.

Here's a look at the current COVID-19 drugs and how they are used:

PILLS

The prescription pills are the first COVID-19 therapies that don't require infusions or injections delivered by health professionals.

The Food and Drug Administration authorized Pfizer's Paxlovid on Wednesday and Merck's molnupiravir on Thursday.

Merck's drug is for adults with a positive COVID-19 test, early symptoms and who face the highest risks of hospitalization. Pfizer's is for anyone 12 and older who likewise face the highest risks of hospitalization.

Pfizer's drug is likely to become the first-choice treatment against the virus, because of its superior benefits and milder side effects. Molnupiravir carries a warning against use during

pregnancy and the potential to cause birth defects. The FDA also said molnupiravir should be considered only when other treatments are unavailable or otherwise inappropriate for a patient.

Both treatments should be started soon after symptoms develop, which means patients must get tested and diagnosed quickly.

Experts predict antiviral pills eventually could be used in combination to combat COVID-19, similar to HIV drugs.

ANTIBODY DRUGS

For more than a year, antibody drugs have been the first-choice treatment for patients with early COVID-19 symptoms who don't yet require hospitalization.

Three such drugs are authorized as treatments in the U.S. and they've been shown to reduce the risk of hospitalization and death by 70% or more when given within 10 days of symptoms. They are mainly used for high-risk adults with early COVID-19 symptoms, but they are also occasionally used to try to block infection in people who are highly vulnerable to the virus.

But the [omicron](#) variant is dampening enthusiasm for them. Drugmakers Regeneron and Eli Lilly recently warned that laboratory testing suggests their antibody therapies will be much less potent against omicron, which contains dozens of mutations that make it harder for the treatments to attack the virus.

The third option, from British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline, appears to be the best positioned to fight omicron, but it's not widely available in the U.S.

The drugs have several limitations: They have to be infused or injected by a health worker and they are expensive and complicated to manufacture.

HOSPITAL TREATMENTS

Remdesivir, an antiviral infusion, remains the only drug for hospitalized patients that specifically targets the coronavirus.

It is used for patients who need extra oxygen but don't require breathing machines. In those cases it's been shown to cut recovery times by several days. But the drug has fallen out of favor with many doctors because it hasn't been shown to improve survival. And the World Health Organization doesn't recommend it, given its cost and the lack of clear benefit.

Steroids drugs — a staple of emergency care — have been shown to boost survival in hospitalized COVID-19 patients by blunting inflammation and other immune-system reactions, which drive the worst effects of the disease in later stages.

U.S. regulators also authorized giving newly infected people transfusions of blood plasma from people who have recovered from COVID-19. But there's little evidence it significantly reduces illness and death.

A U.S. panel of experts concluded the evidence is insufficient for many people and that it's not recommended for hospitalized patients without impaired immunity. And the WHO recently recommended against its continued use.



Explained: When to roll out booster jabs

The WHO has said such a decision should be evidence-based. What is the evidence on protection given by a regular course and an

additional jab? What is India considering; which vaccines are likely to be used?

Written by [Kaunain Sheriff M](#) , [Anuradha Mascarenhas](#) | New Delhi, Pune |

Updated: December 25, 2021 6:22:11 pm



It said the evidence till date "indicates" a "minimal to modest" reduction of vaccine protection against severe disease over six months after the second dose. (File/Partha Paul)

In an interim statement on Wednesday, [the World Health Organization \(WHO\) said the introduction of booster doses](#) of [Covid-19](#) vaccines should be "firmly evidence-driven" and targeted to groups at highest risk of serious disease and frontline workers. It said the evidence till date "indicates" a "minimal to modest" reduction of vaccine protection against severe disease over six months after the second dose.

What is this evidence?

On December 7, the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation conducted a systematic review of 18 studies on vaccine effectiveness, conducted in various countries (not including India) between June 17 and December 2. The vaccines assessed were those Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca (used in India as Covishield), and Johnson & Johnson.

The review estimated the average change in vaccine effectiveness (VE) from 1-6 months after full vaccination. For symptomatic disease, VE decreased by 32% for older adults (above 50)

and 25.4% for all ages. For severe disease, it decreased by 9.7% for older adults, and 8% for all ages. The review summarised that:

- Moderate decrease in VE after 6 months for infection and any symptomatic disease
- Minimal decrease of VE over time against severe disease
- Continued follow-up of VE after 6 months is needed, and for more vaccines
- The impact of [Omicron](#) on waning VE is not known

Are these rates good news or bad?

Leading public health expert Dr Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India, said one should look at two specific data points: age-specific data, and breakthrough infections causing severe disease.

"I would be interested in seeing the data for severe illness in 50-plus, 60-plus, and 70-plus. Let us say, for 60-plus it is 18 %, and 70-plus is 25%. Then we are in trouble," he said.

"We have to see how many of the breakthrough infections are classified as a severe infection. Because if it is mild to moderate, it is not a cause for concern." He added: "Because India also has comorbidities at a younger age, I would also like to look at data at 45-55 plus and the level of severity."

How soon should India ideally start booster doses?

Referring to the WHO statement, V K Paul, head of the national Covid-19 task force, said: "... It [the decision in India] has to be driven by science that is applicable to our situation, driven by science that is applicable to our vaccines. What you read largely is about other platform vaccines in different settings, and with a different

profile of comorbidities, and age profiles in some ways," he said.

"There are intense efforts to culture the virus and we will test our vaccines [against Omicron]. Be rest assured the decision for adolescent vaccination and booster doses will be taken on scientific principles and overarching interest of people of India," he said.

States such as Maharashtra, Kerala and Delhi have repeatedly asked the Centre to begin booster doses. So have the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and many health experts.

"We are very upset about the delay. The UK and some other countries are taking up third dose vaccination. We are told that there is a need for evidence to clear the booster doses. We know for sure the warning signs are there and the government should act proactively," IMA president Dr J A Jayalal said.

Dr Subhash Salunkhe, member of the Covid task force, said booster doses can begin even while primary doses are being given. "This is not an either/or situation. It has to be done concurrently. Those who need the second dose are definitely a priority but the third dose is also required, especially for immuno-compromised persons and healthcare workers."

What aspects are experts considering ?

The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) is examining data from across the world as well as from India on three aspects: T-cell response, antibody response with a particular vaccine and with another vaccine, and how long immunity persists after infection, said Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) chief Dr Balram Bhargava.

Sources said the ICMR's real-time tracker shows breakthrough infections are less than 2% in the general population, and around 7% among doctors and nurses.

Sources said there is a detailed discourse on an additional dose focusing on cellular immunity from memory cells, which play an important role in providing protection against severe disease and hospitalisation.

Also, the source said, "certain dates, and, timelines, are very important. A majority of India's adult population received their first dose immediately prior to the second wave, and the second dose, most of the adult population definitely received it after the second wave... A substantial proportion has already received an 'additional dose' in terms of antibody response from the April-May Delta surge. How this impacts immunity is being scientifically examined," the source said.

Which vaccines can potentially be used as boosters in India?

While NTAGI is examining scientific evidence, a preliminary consensus has been arrived at: if one has taken an inactivated-whole virus (eg [Covaxin](#)) or adenoviral vector vaccine (eg Covishield or AstraZeneca's vaccine), the third dose should not be of the same platform.

Preliminary studies from outside India suggest that a third dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective against the Omicron variant. The emerging data too will be examined.

If and when the recommendation is made, eligible recipients are likely to have multiple options in the coming months, such as:

- Hyderabad-based Biological-E's [Corbevax](#), a protein subunit vaccine that contains only the antigenic parts of the virus
- Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covovax, a recombinant nanoparticle protein-based vaccine, for which US-based Novavax and SII have already received emergency use authorisation in the Philippines

- Bharat Biotech's intranasal vaccine which, sources said, is expected to come in the second half of January.

- India's first m-RNA Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd which, the government has said, is expected to produce 6 crore doses.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Covid-19: Omicron less likely to put you in the hospital, studies say

AP | Dec 23, 2021, 08.11 AM IST



LONDON: Two new British studies provide some early hints that the omicron variant of the coronavirus may be milder than the delta version. Scientists stress that even if the findings of these early studies hold up, any reductions in severity need to be weighed against the fact omicron spreads much faster than delta and is more able to evade vaccines. Sheer numbers of infections could still overwhelm hospitals.

Still, the new studies released Wednesday seem to bolster earlier research that suggests omicron may not be as harmful as the delta variant, said Manuel Ascano Jr, a Vanderbilt University biochemist who studies viruses. "Cautious

optimism is perhaps the best way to look at this," he said. An analysis from the Imperial College London Covid-19 response team estimated hospitalization risks for omicron cases in England, finding people infected with the variant are around 20% less likely to go to the hospital at all than those infected with the delta variant, and 40% less likely to be hospitalized for a night or more.

That analysis included all cases of Covid-19 confirmed by PCR tests in England in the first half of December in which the variant could be identified: 56,000 cases of omicron and 269,000 cases of delta. A separate study out of Scotland, by scientists at the University of Edinburgh and other experts, suggested the risk of hospitalization was two-thirds less with omicron than delta. But that study pointed out that the nearly 24,000 omicron cases in Scotland were predominantly among younger adults ages 20 to 39. Younger people are much less likely to develop severe cases of Covid-19. "This national investigation is one of the first to show that omicron is less likely to result in Covid-19 hospitalization than delta," researchers wrote. While the findings are early observations, "they are encouraging," the authors wrote. The findings have not yet been reviewed by other experts, the gold standard in scientific research. Ascano noted the studies have limitations. For example, the findings are specific to a certain point in time during a quickly changing situation in the United Kingdom and other countries may not fare the same way.

Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, said that in the Scottish study, the percentage of younger people was almost twice as high for the omicron group compared with the delta group, and that "could have biased the conclusions to less severe outcomes caused by omicron." He nonetheless said the data were interesting and suggest omicron might lead to less severe disease. But he added: "It's important to

emphasize that if omicron has a much higher transmission rate compared to delta, the absolute number of people requiring hospitalization might still increase, despite less severe disease in most cases."

Data out of South Africa, where the variant was first detected, have also suggested omicron might be milder there. Salim Abdool Karim, a clinical infectious disease epidemiologist in South Africa, said earlier this week that the rate of admissions to hospitals was far lower for omicron than it was for delta. "Our overall admission rate is in the region of around 2% to 4% compared to previously, where it was closer to 20%," he said. "So even though we're seeing a lot of cases, very few are being admitted."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

No evidence to suggest that existing vaccines don't work on Omicron: Govt

PTI | Dec 21, 2021, 07.04 PM IST



NEW DELHI: There is no evidence to suggest that existing vaccines do not work on Omicron variant of coronavirus, though some of the mutations reported on spike gene may decrease the efficacy of existing vaccines, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday. "There are

limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron," Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a written reply. He was responding to a question on whether the vaccinations that are given in the country are effective to develop immunity for this variant.

"However, vaccine protection is also by antibodies as well as by cellular immunity, which is expected to be relatively better preserved. Hence vaccines are expected to still offer protection against severe disease and, vaccination with the available vaccines remains crucial," he added. Listing the steps taken by the government after the news of the spread of Omicron variant of Covid-19 in various countries, Mandaviya said his ministry on the basis of risk assessment reviewed the existing travel guidelines and revised rules for international arrivals were issued on November 28 which were further amended two days later.

According to the guidelines, regions or countries have been re-classified as 'at-risk' based on epidemiological situation of Covid-19 there and reporting of Omicron variant from these countries. List of such 'at-risk' regions or countries is dynamic in nature and has been updated from time to time. All travellers coming from countries deemed 'at-risk' will also mandatorily undergo COVID-19 testing on arrival through RT-PCR, followed by mandatory home quarantine for 7 days, Mandaviya said.

A repeat RT-PCR testing shall also be done on eighth day of arrival in India to be monitored by state health authorities. Two per cent of travellers from 'non-at-risk' countries will be tested at random for COVID-19. Individuals tested positive shall be subjected to Whole Genomic Sequencing at identified INSACOG network laboratories to determine the presence of SARSCoV-2 variants (including Omicron). States and union territories have been asked to undertake several activities which include strict

monitoring of international travellers in the community, contact tracing of positive individuals and follow up for 14 days, genome sequencing of positive samples through INSACOG Labs in a prompt manner, Mandaviya said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

'Activate war rooms, emergency operation centres': Centre's Omicron advisory to states

TIMESOFINDIA.COM | Dec 21, 2021, 08.53 PM IST



NEW DELHI: The Centre on Tuesday said there were initial signs of surge of Covid-19 cases and increased detection of Omicron variant and asked all states to "activate war rooms".

"Omicron is at least 3 times more transmissible than Delta," Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote to all states and Union territories.

The Centre's advisory to the states called for greater foresight and dynamic decision making..

Here are the key points of Centre's advisory to the states:

Containment:

Imposition of night curfew, strict regulation of large gatherings, curtailing numbers in marriages and funerals, restricting numbers in offices, industries, public transport etc.

In case of all new clusters of Covid positive cases, prompt notification of "Containment Zones", "Buffer Zones" should be done, strict perimeter control of Containment Zone as per extant guidelines must be ensured. All cluster samples must be sent to INSACOG Labs for Genome Sequencing without delay.

Testing and surveillance:

Testing as per ICMR and MoHFW guidelines, door to door case search, testing of all SARI/ILI and vulnerable/co-morbid people, ensuring right proportion of RT-PCR tests in total tests being conducted daily, contact tracing of all Covid positive persons & their timely testing, utilising the access to "AIR SUVIDHA" Portal by State Surveillance Officers (SSOs) & District Surveillance Officers (DSOs) to monitor the international passengers who have arrived in their States & Districts etc.

Clinical management:

Increase bed capacity, other logistics like ambulances, mechanism for seamless shifting of patients, availability and operational readiness of oxygen equipment, a buffer stock of drugs to be ensured by prompt utilization of Emergency Covid Response Package (ECRP-II) funds released by Central government and other available resources etc.

The existing National Clinical Management Protocol remains unchanged for Omicron.

Ensure stringent enforcement of home isolation as per extant guidelines.

This would include among others:

Customised kit for persons undergoing home isolation, their regular monitoring through call centers as well as home visits etc. This will be a very critical activity in the days to come specially to ensure that persons under home isolation do not spread the virus to others in view of its higher transmissibility.

Vaccination:

Ensure 100% coverage of left out first and second dose eligible beneficiaries in an accelerated manner. Special focus is to be given to those districts where the first & second dose coverage is less than the national average. The door-to-door vaccination campaign needs to be strengthened.

Community engagement and Covid appropriate behaviour:

Ensure advance engagement and information so that there is no misinformation or panic, transparent communication on hospital and testing infrastructure availability, regular press briefings etc.

Participation of community backed by strict enforcement is necessary for ensuring Covid appropriate behaviour.

Kindly activate the War rooms/EOCs and keep analyzing all trends and surges, no matter how small and keep taking proactive action at the district/local level.

Regular reviews with field officers and proactive action in this regard will definitely control the spread of infection and flatten the curve.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

India will see Omicron surge but cases will be mild, vaccines will help: Doctor who identified new variant

PTI | Dec 25, 2021, 01.09 PM IST



KOLKATA: India will see a surge in Omicron-driven Covid cases and a high positivity rate but the infection will hopefully be mild in most people as is being seen in South Africa, says Dr Angelique Coetzee who first identified the variant.

The chairperson of the South African Medical Association also said existing vaccines will definitely control the contagion but those unvaccinated are at 100 per cent "risk".

"Existing vaccines will greatly help reduce the spread of the Omicron variant," Coetzee told PTI in a phone interview from Pretoria.

In the case of a vaccinated person or one who has had a history of being infected by Covid-19, it will spread to fewer people, she said, adding that unvaccinated people will potentially spread the virus 100 per cent.

"Existing vaccines would greatly help to reduce the spreading, as we know that you would spread only about 1/3 if vaccinated or had previous history of being infected by Covid, while

unvaccinated people will potentially spread the virus 100 per cent," she said.

According to the South African expert, who first brought the Omicron variant to the world's notice, the Covid pandemic is yet to be over and will become endemic in the days to come.

She disagreed with the opinion of some experts that Covid is heading towards an end with the advent of Omicron, which as of now is comparatively a weaker variant of the coronavirus.

"I do not think so. I believe it will be difficult (for the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic to end soon). I presume it will become endemic," she predicted.

"India will see a surge in Omicron-driven Covid-19 cases and simultaneously there will be a high-positivity rate. But hopefully the majority of the cases will be as mild as what we are seeing here in South Africa," she added as India on Saturday reported 415 cases of the Omicron variant.

Of these, 115 have recovered or migrated, according to the Union health ministry data.

In Coetzee's view, any virus which grows out of control will potentially be a threat to humans.

Discussing the character of the Omicron strain of Covid that is spreading fast across the world and has dampened year-end festivities in many parts of the country, Coetzee said it attacks "warm bodies" and is also infecting children.

"... for now Omicron is not threatening but it is fast spreading with a high infectivity rate, but less severe cases in hospitals. The virus' sole purpose is to infect a warm body and to survive. And yes, children are also being infected by it, but they are recovering in an average of five-six days," she said.

Can the Omicron variant again mutate and change its character?

"Yes, it might mutate in the future to be more deadly, or it might not," she said.

The 61-year-old medical practitioner also held that human behaviour such as wearing masks as well as following safety protocols for Covid-19 will play a huge role in controlling the transmission of Omicron.

"You cannot rely on vaccines alone. Human behaviour unfortunately also plays a huge role and one also needs to be responsible and take ownership of what you do," she stated.

"Vaccines, boosters, masks, good ventilation, stay away from crowds and common sense. Also know the symptoms and when to test, when to see a doctor and get treatment," the renowned South African doctor said.

In India, Maharashtra has recorded the highest number of 108 Omicron cases, followed by Delhi with 79, Gujarat 43, Telangana 38, Kerala 37, Tamil Nadu 34 and Karnataka 31.

Several states and union territories have passed orders to ban gatherings on Christmas and New Year to restrict the spread of the virus.

The health ministry has advised states and union territories to be vigilant and monitor case positivity, doubling rate and cluster of new cases, and consider imposing curbs and restrictions at the local level on Christmas and in the days heading to the New Year.

According to South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), 74 per cent of all the virus genomes it had sequenced in November had been of the Omicron variant. The first instance was found in a sample taken on November 8 in Gauteng.

Data indicated that between November 14 and December 4, hospitalisation across South Africa was comparatively lower than the period when the country was facing the peak linked to the Delta variant in July. ICU occupancy in South Africa has been only 6.3 per cent during this fortnight.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

With administration of over 66 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses, India's vaccination coverage exceeds 141 crore

ANI | Dec 25, 2021, 11.29 AM IST



NEW DELHI: With the administration of 66,09,113 Covid vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's vaccination coverage has exceeded 141 crore, the Union Health Ministry informed on Saturday.

The Ministry, in its release, said that this has been achieved through 1,49,64,300 sessions.

India has reported 7,189 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours. Meanwhile, the case tally of the Omicron variant has reached 415.

As per the Health Ministry, the country's active caseload stands at 77,032, presently the lowest in 579 days.

"Active cases constitute 0.22 per cent of the country's total positive cases, which is lowest since March 2020," said the Ministry.

With 387 COVID deaths in the last 24 hours, the cumulative death toll due to the virus has climbed 4,79,520.

The Ministry further informed that as many as 7,286 patients recovered from the virus in the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative tally of recovered patients since the beginning of the pandemic to 3,42,23,263.

Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.40 per cent, the highest since March 2020.

11,12,195 Covid tests have also been conducted across the country in the last 24 hours. "India has so far conducted over 67.10 crore (67,10,51,627) cumulative tests," said the Ministry.

As per the release, the weekly positivity rate at 0.60 per cent remains less than 1 per cent for the last 41 days now. While the daily positivity rate has been reported to be 0.65 per cent.

"The daily positivity rate has remained below 2 per cent for last 82 days and below 3 per cent for 117 consecutive days now," stated the Ministry.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Covid-19: Omicron less likely to put you in the hospital, studies say

AP | Dec 23, 2021, 08.11 AM IST

LONDON: Two new British studies provide some early hints that the omicron variant of the coronavirus may be milder than the delta version.

Scientists stress that even if the findings of these early studies hold up, any reductions in severity need to be weighed against the fact omicron spreads much faster than delta and is more able to evade vaccines. Sheer numbers of infections could still overwhelm hospitals.



Coronavirus in India: Live updates

Still, the new studies released Wednesday seem to bolster earlier research that suggests omicron may not be as harmful as the delta variant, said Manuel Ascano Jr, a Vanderbilt University biochemist who studies viruses.

"Cautious optimism is perhaps the best way to look at this," he said.

An analysis from the Imperial College London Covid-19 response team estimated hospitalization risks for omicron cases in England, finding people infected with the variant are around 20% less likely to go to the hospital at all than those infected with the delta variant, and 40% less likely to be hospitalized for a night or more.

That analysis included all cases of Covid-19 confirmed by PCR tests in England in the first half of December in which the variant could be identified: 56,000 cases of omicron and 269,000 cases of delta.

A separate study out of Scotland, by scientists at the University of Edinburgh and other experts,

suggested the risk of hospitalization was two-thirds less with omicron than delta. But that study pointed out that the nearly 24,000 omicron cases in Scotland were predominantly among younger adults ages 20 to 39. Younger people are much less likely to develop severe cases of Covid-19.

"This national investigation is one of the first to show that omicron is less likely to result in Covid-19 hospitalization than delta," researchers wrote. While the findings are early observations, "they are encouraging," the authors wrote.

The findings have not yet been reviewed by other experts, the gold standard in scientific research.

Ascano noted the studies have limitations. For example, the findings are specific to a certain point in time during a quickly changing situation in the United Kingdom and other countries may not fare the same way

Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, said that in the Scottish study, the percentage of younger people was almost twice as high for the omicron group compared with the delta group, and that "could have biased the conclusions to less severe outcomes caused by omicron."

He nonetheless said the data were interesting and suggest omicron might lead to less severe disease. But he added: "It's important to emphasize that if omicron has a much higher transmission rate compared to delta, the absolute number of people requiring hospitalization might still increase, despite less severe disease in most cases."



15-18 வயதினருக்கான தடுப்பூசி; ஜனவரி 1 முதல் CoWIN தளத்தில் பதிவு ஆரம்பம்



15-18 வயதுக்குட்பட்டவர்கள் ஜனவரி 1 முதல் CoWIN இல் பதிவு செய்யலாம். பதிவு செய்வதற்கு, ஆதார் அல்லது வேறு எந்த அடையாள அட்டையும் இல்லாத பட்சத்தில், மாணவர் அடையாள அட்டைகளைப் பயன்படுத்தலாம்

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December 27, 2021 3:25:58 pm

Children between 15-18 can register on CoWIN from Jan 1: 15 முதல் 18 வயதுக்குட்பட்ட குழந்தைகள், தங்கள் தடுப்பூசிகளுக்காக ஜனவரி 1 முதல் CoWIN தளத்தில் பதிவு செய்ய முடியும் என்று மத்திய அரசாங்கம் திங்கள்கிழமை தெரிவித்துள்ளது.

பதிவு செய்வதற்கு, ஆதார் அல்லது வேறு எந்த அடையாள அட்டையும் இல்லாத பட்சத்தில், குழந்தைகள் தங்கள் மாணவர் அடையாள அட்டைகளைப் பயன்படுத்த அனுமதிக்கப்படுகிறார்கள் என்று CoWIN தளத்தின் தலைவர் டாக்டர் ஆர்.எஸ். ஷர்மா ANI இடம் தெரிவித்தார்.

பிரதமர் மோடியின் கிறிஸ்துமஸ் இரவு உரைக்கு சில நாட்களுக்குப் பிறகு இந்த அறிவிப்பு வந்துள்ளது. பிரதமர் தனது உரையில் 15-18 வயதுக்குட்பட்ட குழந்தைகள் விரைவில் நாடு தழுவிய தடுப்பூசி இயக்கத்தில் சேர்க்கப்படுவார்கள் என்று கூறினார். மேலும், சுகாதாரப் பணியாளர்கள் மற்றும் முன்களப் பணியாளர்கள் மற்றும் 60 வயதிற்கு மேல் உள்ளவர்களுக்கு இணை நோய் உள்ளவர்களுக்கு தடுப்பூசியின் மூன்றாவது 'முன் எச்சரிக்கை' அல்லது பூஸ்டர் டோஸ் வழங்கப்படும் என்று பிரதமர் அறிவித்தார்.

கோவிட் தடுப்பூசியின் முதல் முன்னெச்சரிக்கை டோஸ், 60 வயதுக்கு மேற்பட்டவர்களில், ஒன்பது மாதங்களுக்கு முன் இரண்டாவது டோஸ் தடுப்பூசியைப் பெற்றவர்களுக்கு வழங்கப்படும், அவர்கள் மூன்றாவது டோஸுக்காக பதிவு செய்யலாம் என்று சர்மா உறுதிப்படுத்தினார். பதிவு செயல்முறை ஏற்கனவே நடைமுறையில் உள்ளது போல் இருக்கும், என்றார்.

முன்னெச்சரிக்கை தடுப்பூசியை முதலில் பெற உள்ளவர்கள் இந்த ஆண்டு ஏப்ரல் மாதத்திற்குள் இரண்டாவது தடுப்பூசியைப் பெற்றவர்கள் என்று அர்த்தம்.

இந்திய மருத்துவ ஆராய்ச்சி கவுன்சில் (ஐசிஎம்ஆர்) மற்றும் ஃபரிதாபாத்தில் உள்ள டிரான்ஸ்லேஷனல் ஹெல்த் சயின்ஸ் அண்ட் டெக்னாலஜி இன்ஸ்டிடியூட் (டிஎச்எஸ்டிஐ) ஆகியவற்றால் மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்ட ஐந்து அறிவியல் ஆய்வுகளின் கண்டுபிடிப்புகளின் அடிப்படையில் இரண்டாவது மற்றும் மூன்றாவது டோஸ்களுக்கு இடையேயான

இடைவெளியை ஒன்பது மாதங்களில் வைத்திருக்க முடிவு செய்யப்பட்டது என்று இந்த விவாதத்தின் ஒரு பகுதியாக இருந்த அரசாங்கத்தின் உயர்மட்ட வட்டாரங்கள் தி இந்தியன் எக்ஸ்பிரஸ்ஸிடம் தெரிவித்தன.

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