Bharat Biotech Factsheet – Vaccine Hesitancy

Why in news?

Nearly a fortnight after it won approval for Covaxin under 'restricted emergency use' conditions, Bharat Biotech has released a fact sheet, with details of possible adverse events and those eligible for the vaccine.

What does the factsheet specify?

- The vaccine [Covaxin] is inadvisable in those with a history of allergies, fever and bleeding disorders.
- Those on medication or blood thinners and whose immunity has been compromised have also been told not to take the vaccine.
- It also recommended that the vaccine is not to be given to the pregnant or the lactating women.
- The vaccine was also contraindicated for those using other COVID-19 vaccines and people with any other serious health related issues.
- To note, a similar set of restrictions has been given to prospective recipients of Covishield too.

Why is this so significant?

- Ordinarily, a fact sheet as well as a product insert (a note that accompanies every vial of a vaccine) is a mandatory formality.
- However, the context in which the two vaccines are being administered in India make them more significant.
- Covaxin has been rolled out with insufficient evidence of its efficacy, or whether it is actually protective.
- The vaccines have been so far made available to health-care and sanitation workers and other frontline staff.
- Notably, they do not have a choice in the vaccine being administered. However, they can decide not to be inoculated.

How is vaccine uptake?

- Nine States have rates of over 70%, and three States, less than 40%. More than half the States fall somewhere in the middle.
- While India has given jabs to nearly 786,000 of those eligible, it is far short of the target of 1.4 million.

- It is certainly early days, and presumably, there will be acceleration in the days ahead.
- However, the government is yet to explain, based on feedback from the States, why the vaccine has not been received well.
- This is in spite of Health Ministry officials underlining that adverse events following vaccination have been negligibly low.

What are the possible reasons?

- The medically literate, as many recipients are, realise the difference between a vaccine being ‘safe’ and ‘efficacious’.
- Moreover, there is a declining trend in new cases.
- Also, the knowledge that an array of vaccines will be available in the months ahead further contributes to the temporary ‘hesitancy’ pervading hospitals now.

What is the way forward?

- The government, to inspire confidence, must monitor, report, and be forthright with the challenges it is facing.
- There should also be greater coordination between the Centre and the States on sharing, investigating and publicising reasons for vaccine hesitancy.

Source: The Hindu

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