Covid-19 Vaccine

Why in news?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) wants the Covid-19 vaccine to be ready for public use way sooner.

What is the vaccine?

- 'Covaxin' is the indigenous Covid-19 vaccine developed by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech.
- It was developed from a strain of SARS-CoV-2 isolated at the National Institute of Virology.

How this decision is viewed?

- The agency's head wrote a letter to the doctors preparing to test the indigenous vaccine for human trials.
- This appeared to be pressurizing the doctors into getting a vaccine ready by August 15, 2020.
- After a **public uproar**, the agency clarified that, its intent was to infuse a sense of urgency given the pandemic.
- It also clarified that there were no plans to deviate from the rulebook on vaccine development.

What are the steps in vaccine approval?

- The basic philosophy of all vaccines involves **introducing the weakened form of the virus** into healthy volunteers.
- Therefore, the first checkpoint is that the vaccine candidate should not sicken a healthy person.
- Next hurdle is that a vaccine must **stimulate the immune system** just enough to get it to produce protective antibodies.
- Finally, only if all were to go well, it must be tested on many people in real world conditions.
- Over time, they must be shown over to be better protected than those who were unvaccinated.
- Each one of these steps cannot be rushed.
- Each step is necessary to ensure that the vaccine can be released for public use.

What is the conclusion?

- Bharat Biotech has experience and credibility in vaccine manufacture.
- However, Covaxin is one of hundreds of potential vaccines being tested.
- Experts' consensus is that no vaccine could be readied for public use until next year.
- It is perplexing why the ICMR would want to cut corners with a basic premise of research that: Science does not progress in a hurry.
- The best strategy is to maintain **absolute transparency**, and proceed surely, even if slowly.

Source: The Hindu

