Parental Consent for Vaccination - Delhi High Court Order

What is the issue?

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- Delhi High Court recently put on hold the Delhi government’s plan for a measles rubella (MR) vaccination campaign in schools.
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- The court said the decision did not have the consent of parents, introducing the question of consent in vaccination.
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What is the MR vaccine?

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- Recently, the measles rubella (MR) vaccine was introduced in the universal immunisation programme.
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- It has to be administered to all children between ages 9 months and 15 years.
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- But those who did not get it earlier are also vaccinated and before they reach the reproductive age group.
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- The vaccine being given in the MR campaign is produced in India and is WHO prequalified.
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- MR vaccine is safe and effective, and in use for over 40 years across 150 countries.
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- It is being given in the routine immunisation programme of India and in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar.
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- Private practitioners in India have been giving measles-rubella (MR) or measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine to children for many years.
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Why is it crucial?

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- India had around 56,000 confirmed measles cases and 1,066 confirmed rubella cases in 2018.
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- Measles is a serious and highly contagious disease that can cause debilitating or fatal complications.
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- These include encephalitis, severe diarrhoea and dehydration, pneumonia, ear infections and permanent vision loss.
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- The disease is preventable through two doses of vaccine.
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- Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) is an important cause of severe birth defects.
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- A woman infected with the rubella virus early in pregnancy has a 90% chance of passing the virus to her foetus.
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- This can cause the death of the foetus or CRS.
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Why is the court's order a welcome move?

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- Obtaining parental consent prior to vaccination is the standard practice around the world.
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- The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises oral, written, and implied consent for vaccination.
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- A WHO survey in 2012 in 34 countries on consent procedures for vaccination in 6-17-year-olds found approximately half the countries using written consent.
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- WHO insists that countries are encouraged to adopt procedures that ensure that parents have been informed and agreed to the vaccination.
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- Vaccination is always a voluntary process, and there is never compulsion involved.
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- Vaccines should be administered after people are sensitised about the disease and vaccine.
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What is the contention here?

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- Schools were consciously chosen rather than health centres or hospitals as nowhere else can such large numbers of children in the relevant age group be targeted.
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- In most US states, it is compulsory to provide vaccination records before seeking admission into school, so that the child is not a danger to others.
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- Also, the consent of parents is not sought during routine immunisation programmes as it is implied, where the parents or members of the family bring the child.
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- For such a public good and for a vaccine that is tried and tested, there is ample evidence on safety and efficacy.
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- Also, for something which is already a part of the universal immunisation programme, written consent should not be essential.
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Source: The Indian Express

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