

## Vaccine Hesitancy - COVID-19

### What is the issue?

The poor uptake of the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) in India indicates the gaps in government's approach in building public trust in this regard.

### How is the vaccine uptake rate?

- Tamil Nadu, perceived to be largely health literate, and relatively well-equipped with health infrastructure, achieved only over 16% of its targeted coverage on the launch day (16 January 2021).
- On the second day of vaccination, the compliance further dropped.
- In some States, vaccination was suspended.
- A marked favouring of the Covishield vaccine over Covaxin was also noticed in multiple States.
- The poor rate of uptake of the vaccine in most States only indicates that the government has not taken the people of the country along in this process.

### Was vaccine hesitancy addressed?

- A vaccine, unequivocally, is a public good.
- But the lack of transparency surrounding the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines has done little to enhance trust in this experiential principle.
- Studies measured high levels of vaccine hesitancy among the general population.
- It remains the same with health-care workers, the first in the line list of people to receive free vaccination.
- Clearly, vaccine hesitancy was not addressed sufficiently, or not taken seriously enough.
- The clearance for Emergency Use Authorisation (in Covaxin, it is emergency use authorisation in 'clinical trial mode') came.
- Following this, there was a high-handed announcement with little attempt to put out compelling evidence in the public domain.
- Nor were the multiple queries addressed in press conferences.
- The inability of the government, and the agencies involved, to amicably resolve controversies surrounding the clearance for Covaxin has had a direct consequence in vaccine uptake.

## What is to be done?

- Vaccinating the nation is a slow and steady process, building confidence in which is crucial to achieving the task at hand.
- Trust in a scientific process can certainly be established with confidence-building measures and full disclosure of all relevant data.
- The COVID-19 vaccination programme is a purely voluntary exercise. But it is vested with great power to retard the pace of the epidemic.
- For such mass campaign that involves voluntary effort on the part of the public to succeed, transparency and open communication channels are crucial.
- The government must do all within its powers to combat vaccine hesitancy.

**Source: The Hindu**

