

India's homegrown vaccine developer warns some to avoid shot

January 19 2021, by Sheikh Saaliq



A health worker receives a COVID-19 vaccine at a government Hospital in Hyderabad, India, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. India started inoculating health workers Saturday in what is likely the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination campaign, joining the ranks of wealthier nations where the effort is already well underway. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

India's homegrown coronavirus vaccine developer Bharat Biotech on Tuesday warned people with weak immunity and other medical conditions including allergies, fever or a bleeding disorder to consult a doctor before getting the shot—and if possible avoid the vaccine.

The company said those receiving vaccinations should disclose their medical condition, medicines they are taking and any history of allergies. It said severe allergic reactions among vaccine recipients may include difficulty breathing, swelling of the face and throat, rapid heartbeat, body rashes, dizziness and weakness.

The vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech ran into controversy after the Indian government allowed its use without concrete data showing its effectiveness in preventing COVID-19. Tens of thousands of people have been given the shot in the past three days after India started inoculating health care workers last weekend in what is likely the world's largest coronavirus vaccination campaign.

India vaccinated 148,266 people on Monday, taking its total to 381,305, the health ministry said.

Indian authorities hope to give vaccines to 300 million people. The recipients are to include 30 million doctors, nurses and other front-line workers, to be followed by 270 million people who either are over 50 or have illnesses that make them vulnerable to COVID-19.

India on Jan. 4 approved the emergency use of two vaccines, one developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and the other by Bharat Biotech. The regulator took the step without publishing information about the Indian vaccine's efficacy.

Bharat Biotech has still not published data on its vaccine's effectiveness but said it is complying with clinical trial guidelines.



School students gesture a hug as they attend classes as schools reopen after being closed for months due to the COVID-19 pandemic in New Delhi, India, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Delhi on Monday opened schools for students of grade 10 and 12 after a gap of more than nine months. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)

The regulator maintains the vaccine is safe and gave its approval in the belief that it could be more effective in tackling a new variant of the coronavirus found in the U.K. The regulator and the company have said efficacy data will be published after ongoing late clinical trials conclude.

Most hospitals in India are inoculating health care workers with the AstraZeneca vaccine. But turnout, particularly in those hospitals using the Bharat Biotech vaccine, has been relatively low, health officials said.

Hospitals in New Delhi that have been administering the Bharat Biotech vaccine have seen many doctors hesitate to get the shot.

Dr. Vinod K. Paul, a member of NITI Aayog, a government think tank, said concerns about adverse effects of the vaccine seemed to be "unfounded and insignificant."

"If our healthcare workers, especially doctors and nurses, are declining it, then it's very unfortunate," Paul told reporters. "Healthcare workers should have faith in our system."

The vaccination drive began at a time when coronavirus infections have fallen sharply, and much of life has returned to normal.

India is second only to the U.S. in the number of confirmed cases, with more than 10.5 million. The country ranks third in the number of reported deaths, behind the U.S. and Brazil, with over 152,000.

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