

India reviews AstraZeneca side effects after concerns in Europe

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India will carry out a deeper review of post-vaccination side effects from the AstraZeneca shot next week although no cases of blood clots have been reported so far, an official told AFP Saturday.

New Delhi decided to conduct the review after several countries suspended rollout over blood clot fears even as the World Health Organization said there was no reason to stop using AstraZeneca's Covid-19 jab.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused use of the drugmaker's shot as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

"We are looking at all the adverse events, particularly serious adverse events like deaths and hospitalisation. We will come back if we find anything of concern," N.K. Arora, a member of India's national task force on Covid-19, told AFP.

India has given at least 28 million shots in its vast vaccination programme, most of them AstraZeneca's which are produced at the Serum Institute of India.

New Delhi has also gifted and allowed exports of millions of these jabs to around 70 countries over the last few weeks as a part of its vaccine diplomacy.

Arora said there was "no immediate issue of concern as number of adverse events (in India) is very, very low. We are relooking at (adverse events that were reported) to see if there was any issue of blood clotting."

"As of yesterday there were 59 or 60 deaths, and they were all coincidental," the doctor said, adding hospitalisation cases were being re-examined.

"In fact there is a real effort from our side that once complete investigation is done, to put its results in public domain, on the ministry of health website," Arora added.

India has been using AstraZeneca and indigenous vaccine giant Bharat Biotech's Covaxin in its rapidly expanding vaccination drive at home.

At least two million people were vaccinated on Friday alone, and this ramp up comes at a time when Covid-19 cases are rising across different Indian states after weeks of decline.

The western state of Maharashtra has announced fresh restrictions and a week-long lockdown in one of its big cities, Nagpur, after the recent spike across the region.

Fresh restrictions including curbs on movement and public gatherings were also reintroduced in some pockets of the state, which is also expected to impact the economic recovery in its industrial belt.

"Some states in the country have been reporting very high number of daily new Covid cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu continue to report a surge in Covid daily cases," the health ministry said in a statement on Friday.

India had registered 23,285 new cases in the last 24 hours, with the six states accounting for 85.6 percent of the new infections, it added.

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