

# India opens up faltering vaccine drive to all over-45s

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India announced Tuesday it will open its vaccination drive to all over-45s from April 1 in a bid to boost its massive but flagging inoculation drive

as infections rise.

India has so far vaccinated nearly 50 million people but the programme to inoculate 300 million people by the end of July is behind schedule, experts say.

Until now only "frontline" workers in healthcare and other areas, together with people over 60 and those over 45 with co-morbidities, have been eligible for either the AstraZeneca vaccine or a homegrown Bharat Biotech shot.

"Following scientific and (COVID19) task force advice, the cabinet today decided to open vaccinations for everyone over 45 years from April 1," Prakash Javadekar, information and broadcast minister, told reporters.

Javadekar also announced that state governments had been directed to provide the second dose four to eight weeks after the first, compared to an earlier regime of four to six weeks.

Experts say that many people are reluctant to get vaccinated for a variety of reasons including safety concerns and apathy about the pandemic after a sharp fall in infections since September.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was vaccinated on March 1, has issued several appeals in recent days asking "all those who are eligible to take the vaccine."

"Together, let us make India COVID-19 free!" he said on Twitter earlier this month.

The number of infections has been rising again in recent weeks, and several regions have been reimposing restrictions on gatherings and

activity.

A particular hotspot is the western state of Maharashtra and its capital Mumbai which has introduced compulsory on-the-spot [coronavirus](#) tests in crowded areas.

Several states have been holding huge political rallies ahead of upcoming elections while massive crowds have been thronging religious festivals, mostly without masks or distancing.

This includes the Kumbh Mela in the northern holy city of Haridwar which on one day earlier this month attracted more than three million pilgrims.

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