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World's largest vaccination programme begins today

PM to launch drive; more than 3 lakh to get jab on first day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first phase of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday during a videoconference.

The world's largest vaccination programme will begin at a total of 3,006 session sites across all the States and the Union Territories, which will be connected virtually throughout the exercise. Nearly 100 beneficiaries will receive the vaccine at each of the session sites on Saturday.

Dedicated call centre

A dedicated 24x7 call centre - 1075 - has been set up to address queries related to the pandemic and the vaccine roll-out, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday said adequate doses of both the vaccines - Covishield and Covaxin - had been delivered across the country. He reviewed the functioning of the CoWIN system, the online digital platform that will be used to drive the vaccination programme.

The vaccination drive, where the beneficiaries currently will not have a choice between the two vaccines, has been planned in a phased manner after identifying the priority groups, the Ministry said. Healthcare workers, both in the government and private sectors, including Integrated Child Development Services workers, will receive the vaccine in

Calling the shots

The Health Ministry has ruled out certain population groups from the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. A lowdown:



WHO SHOULD NOT BE VACCINATED

- Those aged 18 or below
- Pregnant and lactating women
- People with a history of allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccine or to vaccines in general or injectable therapies, pharmaceutical products and food items

WHO ARE PERMITTED (apart from the general population)

- People with a history of COVID-19 infection
- Those with a history of chronic diseases and co-morbidities
- People who have immunodeficiency or HIV, and patients on immunosuppression drugs

Policy cloud delays Brazil vaccine flight

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

A special plane from Brazil to carry the first exports of Covishield, the India-made coronavirus vaccine, was delayed on Friday, amid confusion over clearance for the shipment, officials here said.

the first phase.

The Health Ministry has also issued a three page letter to the States/UTs regarding contraindications and factsheets for the vaccines, indicating that the jab be administered with caution in persons with a history of any bleeding disorder.

The letter further added that persons with COVID-19 infection history and those with history of chronic illness are not contraindication for the vaccine.

The flight, due to leave Brazil on Thursday and return on Saturday with two million doses of the vaccine, was put off, the Brazilian Ministry of Health announced, citing logistical and licensing issues.

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"Persons with immuno deficiency, HIV, patients on immuno-supresion due to any condition - the response of COVID-19 vaccination may be less in these individuals," the communication said.

The CoWin platform will facilitate real time information of vaccine stocks, storage temperature and individualized tracking of beneficiaries for COVID-19 vaccine.

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Policy cloud delays

vaccine export to Brazil

According to the officials, Brazilian authorities have now intimated them that the plane would leave Recife in Brazil on Saturday morning (IST), but only if it receives clearances from India.

The MEA declined to comment specifically on the Brazilian shipment of vaccines, and whether the Brazilian plane would receive the necessary permissions in time. Asked on Thursday how soon India might release vaccines for export to other countries including those in the neighbourhood like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka who have also put in requests, MEA spokesper-

son Anand Srivastava had said that it was "too early" to tell. "As you know, the vaccination process is just starting in India," Mr. Srivastava said, adding, "It is too early to give a specific response on the supplies to other countries."

However, Brazilian officials cited a statement made by Health Secretary Rajesh Bhargava on January 5, saying in "absolutely clear" terms that there was no hold on exports of the vaccines.

The Health Ministry did not respond to a question from *The Hindu* on whether its orders were at variance with the MEA's statement.

Largest vaccination drive begins today

"This digital platform will assist programme managers across national, State, and district levels while conducting vaccination sessions. It will help them track beneficiary coverage, beneficiary dropouts, sessions planned v/s sessions held and vaccine utilization," the Ministry added.

"They can also view the metadata of vaccinations

and Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI) reported from constituent districts across States and UTs. District administrators can additionally create session sites at any location by entering the pin-code, followed by specifying the locality or villages and subsequently assigning a vaccinator," said Dr. Vardhan.