

COVID-19 vaccination: What can be done to continue with the momentum

<https://www.expresshealthcare.in/news/covid-19-vaccination-what-can-be-done-to-continue-with-the-momentum/428718/>

COVID-19 vaccination: What can be done to continue with the momentum?

By EH News Bureau — On May 14, 2021

NEWS GUEST BLOGS PUBLIC HEALTH



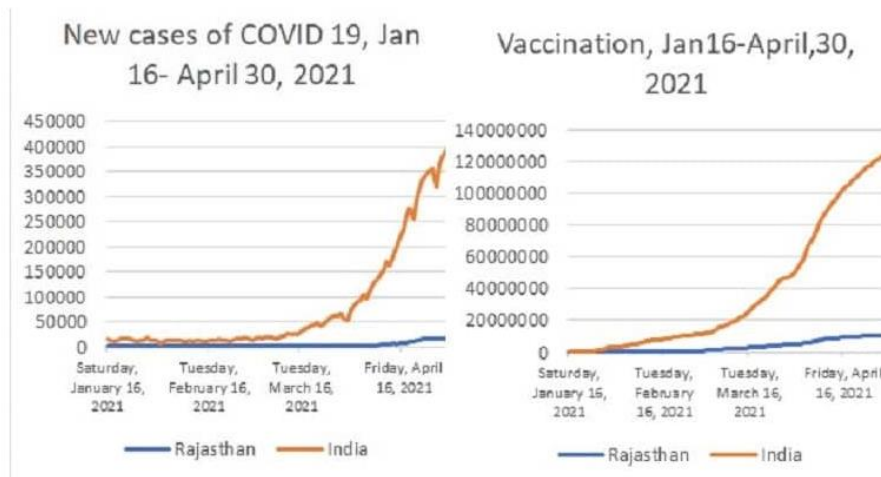
Dr Neetu Purohit, Associate Professor, IIHMR University, Jaipur explains why a well-designed awareness drive leading to informed willingness will keep up the momentum for COVID-19 vaccination rather than fear-driven and imposition-driven decisions which have a short life

The beeline of young and aged people for vaccination illustrates that no promotion works better than fear, fear not owing to any fear appeal used in any health communication approach of awareness generation but real fear, observed and/or experienced.

The surge in COVID-19 cases and case fatalities coupled with crumbling health system due to shortage in supply of essential drugs and equipment have infused panic among the masses. Last year, these were the months when we were not much aware about the treatment, this year we are more confident about the treatment procedures, but the number of cases is so large that access to treatment has become difficult. This has resulted in fear and improved perception of the people towards COVID-19 vaccination.

As the cases have sprung, the demand for COVID-19 vaccination has also increased. Those people who were negating vaccination as it does not protect against coronavirus, suddenly have got interested in those studies by specialists which supported that vaccination is the only available solution to escape severity of infection. Even people with vaccination can get infected but, in most cases, the infection ranges between mild to moderate.

A data scan of the number of new cases and the vaccine shots administered from January 16 to April 30, 2021 very well depicts the scenario.



It is not that awareness did not work, it worked but at a modest level. India began administration of COVID-19 vaccines on 16 January 2021 and by May 1, two per cent of the population had received both the doses. The push in the vaccination came by mid-March which could be viewed as proportional to increase in positive cases.

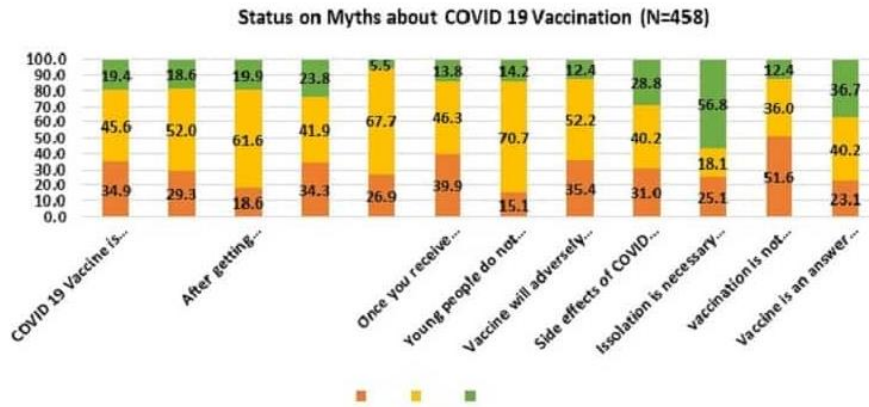
Expanding vaccination to younger population above 18 is a welcome move. The centre and state governments will see that adequate supply of vaccines is made available for all. The question is that would people remain motivated to take their vaccine shots even if the cases subside.

Experts predict that we would be able to control this increase in cases by July with lock-down and desired protective behaviours and a third wave could be expected by October 2021. Would people behave wisely by following desired behaviours in the ensuing months and take vaccines on their turn as the roll-out of vaccine to all states and districts will take time? What can be done to not let the motivation for vaccine go down? Remove the myths and information barriers!

A household survey was conducted in Jaipur by students of IIHMR University in the month of March 2021. Interview with the sample comprising 458 respondents revealed that of the sample, 10 per cent were already vaccinated, and 53 per cent expressed willingness for vaccination. The concern is about 8 per cent, who expressed unwillingness to get vaccination and around 28 per cent who were indecisive in those days of lower-case load.

Several misconceptions and myths about COVID-19 vaccination were also uncovered. It was found that around 35 per cent of the people were not certain that the vaccine was safe, and neither were 30 per cent aware that having been infected with COVID-19 in the past doesn't mean that vaccination is not required.

About 24 per cent believed that vaccine administration instantly builds immunity against virus and 29 per cent perceived that side effects of COVID-19 vaccination can transmit infection to others. A look at status of myths show that promotion efforts need to be address to them to ensure that the momentum for vaccination continues till we all are vaccinated.



This data was collected when the number of COVID-19 cases had gone down. With the increase in cases, people's perception about vaccination might have undergone change.

But the question is what led to the change: fear or awareness. Fear-driven and imposition-driven decisions have a short-life; a well-designed awareness drive is the need of the hour.

Removing the information barriers about vaccination should be among the upmost priority of the health system. The task of dispelling the myths need to be taken up in a systematic manner by health system-Information Education Communication (IEC) division and other non-governmental organisations by providing scientific information in simplistic terms so that people understand the importance of taking vaccination and opt for it not due to fear but informed willingness.