Elaborate mechanism to ensure Corona vaccine programme succeeds

New Delhi, Jan 18 (India Science Wire): Considering that the highest level of political and administrative ownership, commitment, and support are needed to be sustained for the successful implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Central Government has established an elaborate governance mechanism covering all levels, from the national to State, district, and block levels.

At the top is a “National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19” (NEGVAC) to fast-track policy decisions and timely implementations. It is constituted under the chairpersonship of Member (Health), NITI Aayog and Co-chairpersonship of Secretary (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). The members include representatives from the Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Health Research, Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Directorate General Health Services, AIIMS Delhi, National Technical Advisory Group on immunization (NTAGI), Ministry of Finance and five State Governments representing the various regions in the country.

It guides on all aspects of COVID-19 vaccination including equitable distribution of vaccine, procurements, financing, delivery mechanisms, prioritization of population groups, and vaccine safety surveillance. Its agenda also covers regional cooperation, assisting neighbouring countries, and communication and media response.

At the state level, each one has a Steering Committee, a Task Force and a control room. The Steering Committees have Chief Secretary as the Chairperson, and Principal Secretary, Health as Convener. The membership of the panel covers a wide spectrum of stakeholders including officials from various departments of the State Government that would be involved in the delivery of the vaccination in some way or the other such as Health, Women & Child Development (WCD), Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Municipal Corporations, Revenue, Home department, Social Welfare and Sports & Youth Affairs; representatives of organisations such as National Cadet Corps (NCC), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), National Service Scheme (NSS); and of central ministries /departments/agencies needed for COVID-19 vaccination purpose (Railways, Central Paramilitary forces, Defence establishments etc.).

The panels also have members from development partners such as World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), John Snow Inc (JSI), Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), Infrastructure Professionals Enterprise Private Limited (IPE Global), Rotary International, Lions Club International.

The panels are required to meet at least once in a month. Their mandate is to ensure active involvement of all concerned departments and stakeholders; track social media and other
platforms for possible misinformation and rumours; ensure safe storage, transportation and delivery of vaccine doses; devise innovative strategies to improve community engagement; and ensure that all adverse events following immunisation (AEFIs) are investigated on a timely basis and causality assessment is expedited.

The State level task forces, in turn, have Additional Chief Secretary/Commissioner/Principal Secretary, Health as the Chairperson and State Immunization Officer (SIO) as Member Secretary. The other members include Mission Director, National Health Mission, State-level implementing officers from the health and other key government departments; representatives of Central Government Ministries; and institutions which have healthcare workers and frontline workers who need to be vaccinated and also those who can contribute to vaccination process like ESIC hospitals, Railways Hospitals, Defence Forces. The task forces are required to meet at least once every fortnight.

The mandate of the task forces includes tracking the districts for adherence to timelines as per the guidelines approved by NEGVAC and communicated from the national level and regularly evaluate with districts and urban local bodies to review and resolve issues such as logistics, human resource availability and training. (India Science Wire)

Keywords: ownership, commitment, support, governance, NEGVAC, fast-track, policy, NITI Aayog, equitable, safety, surveillance, communication, media, stakeholders, social media, misinformation, rumours, logistics, training

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