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## India is dealing with a vaccine shortage during a new wave of Covid-19

The country's vaccine supply is being hampered by export limits from the US and EU.

By Katelyn Burns | Apr 18, 2021, 3:10pm EDT



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India is the second most populous nation and the largest producer of Covid-19 vaccines worldwide, thanks to being home to the Serum Institute of India (SII) — a biotech and pharmaceuticals company responsible for 60 percent of the globe's entire vaccine supply, **according to a CNN report.**

But recent US and European limits on the exportation of critical Covid-19 vaccine production materials have resulted in a severe vaccine shortage throughout the country. Many of its nearly 1.4 billion residents are now finding themselves having to wait for shots during a deadly second wave of the coronavirus.

India reported a record high of 261,500 new cases on Sunday, the highest recorded figure since the onset of the pandemic. The country also added a million new cases in less than a week, reaching a total of more than 14 million cases.

The surge has forced India back into lockdown, with Delhi, the country's capital region, imposing night and weekend curfews in order to limit the spread of the virus.

India is also a major manufacturer supplying **COVAX**, the international Covid-19 manufacturing and distribution agreement. SII had originally committed to manufacture up to 200 million doses for 92 countries. Those plans are on hold for now.

"Deliveries of doses from the Serum Institute of India will be delayed in March and April," said a **March 25 statement by COVAX**, which is run by a coalition including the World Health Organization. "Delays in securing supplies of SII-produced Covid-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand for Covid-19 vaccines in India."

SII has an agreement to manufacture the AstraZeneca vaccine, as well as a homegrown vaccine called Covaxin. It had already provided 28 million doses for COVAX distribution

and was scheduled to deliver another 40 million doses in April and 50 million in May, **according to a CNN report.**

In January, however, the Indian government restricted the export of their AstraZeneca doses, a decision which John Nkengasong, director of the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **called “catastrophic” for Africa in early April.** The continent was set to get much of its vaccine supply through COVAX.

When India started its vaccination program in January, it set a goal of fully vaccinating 300 million people by the end of August, but to date, **only 16 million people** have been given full doses, just over 1 percent of the country’s population, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

### **US and European export limits are hurting India’s supply**

In early February, President Joe Biden invoked the US Defense Production Act to limit the export of manufacturing supplies needed for Covid-19 vaccine production. At the time, the White House **said it used the act** to help pharmaceutical giant Merck ramp up its production of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the US distribution of which was recently **put on hold** to examine a very limited number of possibly harmful side effects in rare cases.

In late March, the European Union put similar export limits in place in order to help ramp up European vaccine production. Together, the two export bans have hit SII especially hard.

“There are a lot of bags, filters, and critical items that manufacturers need,” Adar Poonawalla, CEO of SII, **told Reuters in early March.** “The Novavax vaccine, which we are a major manufacturer of, needs these items from the US.”

The export bans are having a knock-on effect to global vaccine production just as the world has begun dealing with an especially deadly wave of new Covid-19 variants. On Saturday, the world **passed 3 million deaths from the virus.**

But not everyone in the Indian government is placing the blame solely on the export limits. Both India’s Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Home Minister Amit Shah have claimed that the country has the vaccines it needs, and that the deficiencies have come from poor planning within individual states. In an **April 7 statement**, Vardhan singled out Maharashtra — one of the most severely affected Indian states in the pandemic — as being especially disorganized.

### **India intends to expand its vaccine approval**

Even with its accusations leveled at states, the federal government may be starting to feel some blame, or at least some responsibility. On Tuesday, India **announced its plans** to fast-track emergency approvals for vaccines that have been approved elsewhere by WHO, but aren't currently being administered in the country. These include Pfizer/BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, and Moderna.

But there's still a long way to go, and despite the mudslinging between the state and federal government branches in India, it's clear that the main cause of the shortage is likely coming from the export limits. As wealthier EU and North American countries are beginning to look past the virus and their vaccination programs ramp up delivery of needed doses — the US **has delivered over 209 million vaccine doses** as of Sunday — the rest of the world seems to be getting left behind.

Vaccination centers across India have been **forced to close** due to lack of doses, and the global supply chain will seemingly remain strained until material exports begin flowing from the West.

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