

Vaccination drive slow to take off in 3 key hospitals

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NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19

DESPITE TOP doctors leading by example, healthcare workers at AIIMS, Safdarjung and RML Hospital have been slow to turn up to get the Covid shot, data from the first three days of the vaccine drive shows. A total of 127, 158 and 122 staff at RML, AIIMS and Safdarjung have received the vaccine so far.

Across Delhi's 81 sites on Tuesday, 4,936 healthcare workers were vaccinated — 48.75% of the expected target of 10,125 beneficiaries. Government sources said there is a slight improvement in numbers as compared to Monday when 44% of beneficiaries turned up. Sixteen cases of AEFI (adverse event following immunisation) were reported.

At RML, AIIMS and Safdarjung, 27, 55 and 30 staff respectively got vaccinated Tuesday, though each hospital set a target of inoculating 100 a day. The three hospitals are among six in the capital which have been given the mandate to vaccinate employees with Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, currently under phase 3 clinical trials. At 75 other centres, Covishield is being given.

A senior official from the New Delhi's district administration said, "We noticed the low turnout of staff and HCWs at these three hospitals and realised that some people are apprehensive and are waiting to see the vaccine's effects on the first batch of participants for 14 days before taking a decision. The consent form has also provoked second thoughts."

On Day 1 of the vaccine drive,



4,936 healthcare workers were vaccinated Tuesday. Amit Mehra

AIIMS director Randeep Guleria, RML medical superintendent AK Rana, NITI Aayog member V K Paul and Medical Director of Lady Hardinge Medical College Dr NN Mathur had got the Covaxin shot.

Dr Rana told *The Indian Express*: "There are several factors behind fluctuating numbers. We faced issues in running CoWIN app which has names of registered beneficiaries. On Monday, we took many healthcare workers on a walk-in basis, which increased the overall number. I have been sharing my experience with all staff members to motivate them to take the vaccine."

Dr DK Sharma, AIIMS medical superintendent, reiterated this: "It is difficult to say why the number was low on Monday. But as a regular exercise, we have been motivating and encouraging our healthcare workers to come forward... The institute's director has set an example..."

Health Minister Satyendar Jain Tuesday said the exercise is voluntary but added: "It is the initial days of the drive and it will take time, but people's confidence will pick up."

At RML, the resident doctors' association had earlier raised apprehensions about the vaccine.

Said a 23-year-old employee at the hospital who was on the list but did not turn up on Saturday or Monday: "I will take a call in a few days." Another staffer at the same hospital said he "will take it in 8-10 days".

Dr Sagar Borker, an associate professor at the community medicine department at RML and part of the vaccination team, told *The Indian Express*, "There are definitely those who are apprehensive. However, this is natural, considering that Covaxin is being given in trial mode. I have been vaccinated, and many others are also voluntarily coming for it."

At Safdarjung hospital, a 27-year-old resident doctor said: "I am not against getting vaccinated; I just want to wait and see."

Some, though, were more keen. A 34-year-old support staff at AIIMS, who handles transportation of Covid samples, said, "We have been working in the Covid ward, and it is extremely dangerous. When my name comes, I shall get the vaccine."