

COVID VACCINATION DRIVE KICKS OFF AT 81 SITES

Delhi rolls up its sleeve

After months of hardship, healthcare, frontline workers breathe sigh of relief as national capital vaccinates over 4,000 people on first day

At RML, spirits high: ‘Worked hard, glad to get the benefit first’

ANANYA TIWARI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 16

ENTHUSIASM was high at the Centre-run Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, among the few hospitals in the national capital to administer Covaxin on Saturday. While Covishield was given at 75 centres, six centres gave Covaxin to recipients.

On Day 1 of the massive exercise, 31 health workers and staff were given the Bharat-Biotech produced vaccine. “We have around 6,500 staff/healthcare workers in the hospital who shall be vaccinated in the coming weeks, with a target of 300 per day,” said Dr Neelam Roy, the nodal official-in-charge.

Dr A K Rana, medical superintendent of the hospital, who also got the shot Saturday, said doubts and suspicions over the vaccines were unfounded and that they were based on “rock-solid science”.

The first individual to be vaccinated was Ramakant Singh (40), a security guard at the hospital, who said: “I feel good — no side effects at all. This is good for us.” Jitender Singh Chauhan (36), also a security guard, was also in queue: “We worked quite hard during the lockdown and continue to do so even now; I’m glad we are getting the benefit first.”

Many nursing officials who have spent the past several months under Covid’s shadow also got the vaccine. R K Boyala (55), the superintendent nursing officer, said, “I feel good, hopeful. I did not really feel scared, nor did I get any side effects. I was infected with Covid in May and had recovered. We deal with so many people on a daily basis and have to go home to our families, so the vaccination is welcome.”

Urmil Jaiswal (55), assistant superintendent nursing officer, said, “Life will become smoother now — we suffered a lot this past year. People lost a lot — their incomes, education, and livelihoods. Hopefully life will finally come back on track. We tend to take a lot of precautions, but with this our families are safer.”

HOW MANY RECEIVED SHOT AT TOP HOSPITALS

- 95 at AIIMS
- 32 at Lok Nayak
- 31 at GTB
- 31 at RML
- 26 at Lady Hardinge
- 45 at Rajiv Gandhi

People who got Covaxin were asked to sign a consent form and provided with a fact sheet issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with information on the make of the vaccine, its possible side effects and allergic reactions. The individuals were kept under observation for 30 minutes and asked to report back if they had any adverse effects over the next week. They were told to come back in 28 days for the second shot.

The fact sheet also stated that clinical efficacy of the vaccine has not been established as it is currently under phase 3 trial. It stated that the patients shall be followed up for three months, and in case of any adverse effects causally related to the vaccine, they shall be provided healthcare at government hospitals, and be given compensation as decided by the ICMR Central Ethics Committee.

Leela Batkar (60), a deputy nursing officer said, “We are getting vaccines so it encourages others to come forward and get vaccinated as well. If we get scared, what will happen to the public?”

Dr Ramesh Chand Keshav, a faculty from the anaesthesia department, said: “We may not have had a choice when it came to the vaccine, yet it is important and shall provide immunity. This is the only way maximum people can be protected.”

Also at the hospital was Ashwini Kumar Choubey, MoS in the Health Ministry, who gave flowers to many healthcare workers. “As one can see, so many people are getting vaccinated, there is no need for any fear,” he said.

Meanwhile, its RDA seeks vaccine switch

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 16

THE RESIDENT Doctors’ Association (RDA) of Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital Saturday requested the medical superintendent to vaccinate them with Covishield, developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca and manufactured by Serum Institute of India. The hospital is among six institutes in the capital that are administering Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin.

In a letter to the medical superintendent, the association said: “Resident doctors are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in case of Covaxin and might not participate in huge numbers, thus defeating the purpose of vaccination. We request you to vaccinate us with Covishield which has completed all stages of trial before its rollout.”

On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Covid vaccination drive and asserted that the made-in-India vaccine being rolled out will ensure a “decisive victory” for the country over the pandemic.

Covaxin, jointly made by Bharat Biotech, in collaboration with ICMR and National Institute of Virology, has been given restricted approval “in emergency situation in public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical

trial mode, to have more options for vaccinations, especially in case of infection by mutant strains”.

Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, who visited the hospital to take stock of the vaccination drive, said: “We can only tell you our view point and from our view point, both vaccines are equally good and safe. The whole country has welcomed the move very happily. Time and again, we are trying to tell everybody to believe in what experts are saying. Experts have done good quality research and put their heart and soul in bringing out the vaccine.”

In the capital, six central government hospitals — AIIMS, Safdarjung, RML, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital and two ESI hospitals — have been chosen as sites for Covaxin, while 75 are giving Covishield.

Said Dr Nirmalya Mohapatra, the RDA vice-president, “We don’t want to be treated like guinea pigs under clinical trials. Residents in the hospital had voluntarily registered for the vaccination programme but as they came to know about the vaccine being used in the institute, many of them expressed apprehensions.”

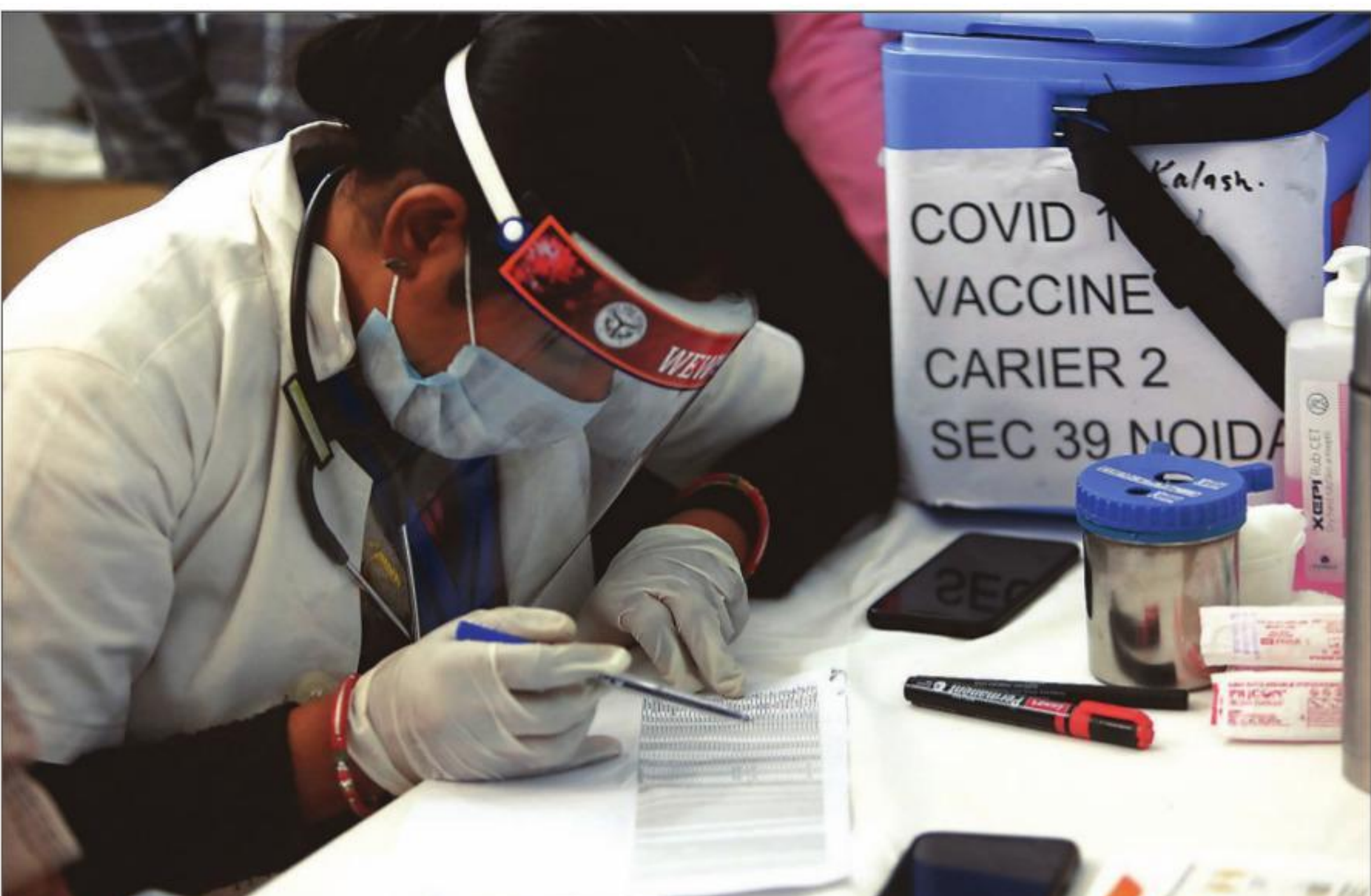
Dr AK Rana, medical superintendent, said: “I will try to speak to the residents on Monday. The decision to change the vaccine is to be taken by top authorities.”



(from left); Sheetal Bharadwaj works in the accounts dept at an East Delhi hospital; nurses at RML; Adeethi K, a nurse at Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya



(from left) Radha Chaudhary, a sanitation worker in Gurgaon; Poonam Sharma, an anganwadi worker; Abhinav, an orthopaedic surgeon at Max Saket



Gajendra Yadav



Gajendra Yadav



(Top) During the Covid-19 vaccination drive at Noida’s Kailash Hospital (Above) Ambuj Pandey, a 47-year-old Asha worker in Gurgaon (left) Health workers at a Noida government hospital

Anganwadi, ASHA workers first in Gurgaon queue: ‘Didn’t think twice, trust authorities’

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, JANUARY 16

AS THE Prime Minister’s speech, being broadcast live at the Government Girls Primary School in Gurgaon, came to an end, Radha Chaudhary (47), a sanitation worker at Wazirabad’s Primary Health Centre, got up from her seat and walked to ‘Vaccination Officer — I’.

After providing documentation and getting details cross-checked in the list of beneficiaries, she walked into a second classroom, where her details were uploaded on the Covid

portal. Once this was done, she crossed a green curtain and emerged moments later as the first person in Gurgaon to have been administered the Covid vaccine.

Said the mother of three: “My work is such that I am constantly in high footfall areas. I did not think twice when I heard I was eligible — I trust the authorities and believe only the vaccination can help.”

For Poonam Sharma, an anganwadi worker, the decision to get vaccinated was preceded by long discussions with relatives. “I was in two minds because of some of the things I had read, but I decided to take the chance.

These are chances we take with every other medicine or vaccine as well,” she said. “I have been living very carefully, in the same house as my husband, two children, and father-in-law. They keep a bucket of water and a mug for me to bathe when I get home. I will continue to follow precautions, but mentally I will be more at ease now.”

Ambuj Pandey, a 47-year-old Asha worker, reiterated this: “We have to go from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, meet people face-to-face. We have been involved in Covid duty. So when this vaccine came, there was no doubt I had to take it. I will come back next

month for the second shot.”

As per data shared by officials, 608 people were vaccinated on Day 1 at 6 sites — none reported any adverse events following immunisation (AEFI).

Gurgaon Civil Surgeon Dr Virender Yadav, the second beneficiary of the vaccine, said he decided to get vaccinated in the hope of “removing doubts of people and instilling confidence in the vaccine”. He said “no person had any problem because of the vaccine”.

At Medanta - The Medicity, another centre for vaccination, among the first to get the shot was cardiologist Dr Naresh Trehan. “It is crucial for every-

one to get this vaccine to protect their relatives and society. In terms of safety, it does not seem there will be any difficulty. If there is anything such as pain or light fever, it is natural. It shows that the vaccine is working,” he said.

As Dr Trehan was being administered the vaccine at Medanta, at the vaccination centre in Wazirabad, Radha Chaudhary walked out of the observation room, half-an-hour after being administered the shot. Immediately, others waiting in line called out to her, asking how she felt. Chaudhary lifted both her hands and gave them a double thumbs up.

Some app delays but process smooth

ARANYA SHANKAR & ASHNA BUTANI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 16

WELCOMED WITH balloons, all 100 people listed as beneficiaries at Max Super Specialty Hospital, Saket, were administered the Covid vaccine on Saturday.

While the immunisation drive was to begin at 10.30 am, simultaneously with the PM’s speech, it started an hour later due to an issue with the CoWin app server. “We completed our entire list by around 5.30 pm,” said medical superintendent Sahar Qureshi.

Once it began, the process was smooth. The list of beneficiaries was alphabetical, and they were asked to come by 9-9.30 am. Some received SMSes from the Centre, others got calls from the hospital to arrive on time and bring their Aadhaar card.

First in line to get the shot was Ashutosh Chaturvedi (31), a nurse in-charge in the Emergency department: “For 8-9 months, I could not meet my family; I sent them to Rajasthan. I was given the Covishield vaccine — it was painless and comfortable.”

Also on the list was Dr Abhinav (30), an orthopaedic surgeon who recovered from Covid: “My brother and I got the virus last September; he had to be admitted to the ICU. My parents are above 60 years of age, so getting the vaccine will definitely give me more confidence to meet them.”

Abhimanyu Singh (30), a doctor who worked in the Covid ICU since June, was on the list too. “I didn’t have any side effects but was told there may be slight fever or myalgia (muscle pain), which happens with any vaccine.”

On average, it took around 45 minutes to vaccinate one person.

Meanwhile in East Delhi, Nitin Dhama (28), a lab technician at Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya, was excited about the prospect of seeing his mother, grandmother, wife and three-year-old son again. For the past 10 months, he has been living at the hospital’s hostel. “After my second dose, I will go meet them more often.”

Nitin was among 100 healthcare workers at the centre who received the Covid vaccine.

Adeethi K (34), a nurse, was the first beneficiary. She said, “My husband is also a nurse. We contracted Covid last May and sent our children, aged two and five, to our hometown in Kerala. They have come back now so we do not want them to get exposed. I am glad to be among the first to get vaccinated.”

While some were confident, others were hesitant. Three staffers discussed the pros and cons of getting the vaccine. Sheetal Bharadwaj (28), who works in the accounts department, said, “It is ironic that we were all waiting for the vaccine for so long but now that it is here, we are scared. I think it is safe and once I get it, I will encourage my family and friends to do so too.”

By 5 pm, 49 beneficiaries had been vaccinated. Hospital officials said there was a slight delay initially as the Co-WIN app was down for a short while.

Medical Superintendent Dr Mamta Jajoo said, “The process was quite smooth. We had sent the Delhi government details of all our healthcare workers a few days earlier. On Friday evening, we received a list of 100 healthcare workers. We then sent them messages regarding timings.”

“Of the 49 beneficiaries, only one or two had mild symptoms like headaches for 5-7 minutes.” All beneficiaries were kept in observation post the shot,” she said.

At Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, by 5 pm, 33 beneficiaries had got the shot. Among them was Rampal Gurjar (36), who was also on duty as a vaccination officer. “It is our duty as healthcare workers to go first,” he said.