

Serum CEO Adar Poonawalla says will return to India in a few days



[Serum Institute of India](#) CEO Adar Poonawalla, who has been in the UK on extended stay to evade alleged threats in India over ever-increasing demand for COVID-19 vaccines, has said he will return in a few days.

In an interview to 'The Times', Poonawalla had alleged that he had been receiving threats in India and that he and his family had left the country for London after unprecedented "pressure and aggression" over the demand of [COVID-19 vaccines](#).

In a late night tweet on Saturday, he said the production of Covishield -- the Oxford/AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine that is being produced by Serum Institute in India -- was in full swing at SII's facility in Pune. "Pleased to state that COVISHIELD's production is in full swing in Pune. I look forward to reviewing operations upon my return in a few days," Poonawalla said.

He, however, did not give a timeline for his return to India.

On his stay in the UK, the Serum Institute of India (SII) head said that he "had an excellent meeting" with all partners and stakeholders in that country.

Indian authorities are scrambling for vaccines, medicines and oxygen as the nation faces its worst health crisis. The number of daily [coronavirus](#) cases in India slipped slightly, a day after becoming the first in the world to cross the 4 lakh mark.

India's new [coronavirus](#) cases rose by 3,92,488, while deaths from the infection jumped by 3,689 over the past 24 hours, according to health ministry data released on Sunday. Total case load now stands at 1.95 crore with 2,15,542 deaths.

"I'm staying here for an extended period because I don't want to go back to that situation," The Times cited Poonawalla as saying in an interview published on Saturday.

"I don't want to be in a situation where you are trying to do your job and just because you can't supply the needs of X, Y or Z, you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," he had said, adding, "Everything falls on my shoulders, but I can't do it alone."

In the interview, when asked about the impact of the 'Kumbh Mela' and the Assembly elections on the second wave in India, Poonawalla had said his "head would be chopped off" if he answered on such a "sensitive" matter.

His comments triggered a range of comments, with some expressing disappointment at his move. Some even criticised him for stating in the interview that SII was planning to begin production outside India.

India rolled out the third phase of its COVID-19 vaccination drive for those in the age group of 18-45 years on Saturday though the inoculation process failed to take off in some states due to shortage of vaccines.

While Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir among other states and union territories launched the vaccination drive, Karnataka and Odisha made only a symbolic start to it.

The interview to 'The Times' was his first comments since he was provided with 'Y' category security by the government last week. Poonawalla told 'The Times' about receiving aggressive calls from some of the most powerful people in India, demanding supplies of Covishield.

That pressure is largely behind his decision to fly into London to be with his wife and children, the 40-year-old entrepreneur had said.

The businessman indicated in the interview that his move to London is also linked to business plans to expand vaccine manufacturing to countries outside India, which may include the likes of the UK.

Last week, SII announced a cut in the price of the jab it plans to sell to states to Rs 300 per dose after his earlier pricing of Rs 400 was severely criticised. That price compares to Rs 150 per dose rate SII charged for selling vaccines to the central government.

Covishield is the most used COVID-19 vaccine in India. It along with Bharat Biotech's Covaxin is being used by the government for vaccination in the country.

[Serum Institution of India](#)