

Dr. Harsh Vardhan interacts with his Social Media followers through 'Sunday Samvad'

“I shall be the first to offer myself for receiving COVID vaccine, if people have a trust deficit”

“Consensus likely soon on emergency authorization for COVID vaccine”

Frontline Healthcare workers, senior citizens & persons with comorbidities shall be priority for receiving COVID vaccine: Dr Harsh Vardhan

Posted On: 13 SEP 2020 4:23PM by PIB Delhi

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare today interacted and answered questions posed by his social media followers on the *Sunday Samvad* platform. These questions covered a multitude of queries concerning not only the current situation of COVID but also the government's approach to it, the likely changes one expects to see in the post COVID world and the steps taken by government in its facilitation.

The Minister informed that while no date has been fixed for the vaccine launch, it may be ready by the first quarter of 2021. Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that the Government is taking full precautions in conducting the human trials of the vaccine and the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 under the Chairmanship of Dr. V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog is drawing up a detailed strategy on how to immunize majority of the population. “Issues like vaccine security, cost, equity, cold-chain requirements, production timelines etc., are also been discussed intensely”, he stated. He assured the vaccine will be first made available to those who need it the most, irrespective of their paying capacity.

Further, he said that the Government is considering emergency authorization of COVID-19 vaccination especially in the case of senior citizens & people working in high-risk settings. “This shall be done after a consensus has been reached”, he said.

To allay fears regarding the safety aspect of the vaccines, he said he will be happy to take the first dosage of vaccine if some people have a trust deficit.

Elaborating on the vaccine candidates and their development in India, he said that Department of Bio Technology (DBT) as well as Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been pro-active in responding to the emerging situation to support advancement of vaccine candidates. India is actively

partnering with Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and trials at different phases are ongoing with respect to several vaccines in Indian laboratories (private or public) and hospitals.

The Minister also noted that a safe and effective vaccine will help in establishing immunity to COVID-19 at much faster pace as compared to the natural infection. It is hoped that a consensus will emerge in next few months over the desired level of protective herd immunity in any community, he stated.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan highlighted how the pandemic became a turning point for Indian manufacturing. From the time when there were “no indigenous manufacturers of PPEs with requisite standards, now there are nearly 110 indigenous manufacturers of PPE with requisite standards. The country is in a position to not only meet its own demands but also export to help out fellow nations”, Dr Harsh Vardhan said. Similar ‘Make in India’ initiatives were launched and promoted for enhancing indigenous manufacturing of diagnostic kits, ventilators, drugs like Remdesivir etc., and reducing reliance on foreign countries. This was made possible through the ‘Whole of Government’ approach under the leadership of Prime Minister. A multipronged strategy of promoting indigenous manufacturers and ensuring market availability was adopted with the partnership of various Ministries. He added that the Government took a number of initiatives to promote domestic manufacturing of critical APIs in India and thereby decrease India's dependence on imports of such APIs.

In order to make the healthcare cost reasonable and affordable for the common man, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that the Government has directed all States and UTs to fix a reasonable price for COVID-19 treatment in private hospitals. Free coverage up to ₹ 5 lakhs for COVID patients for those who are eligible under the Ayushman Bharat PMJAY package was announced. He added that the Central Government has also asked States/UTs to proactively engage with the private sector health providers and consider pooling in public and private healthcare facilities, as this will help in providing prompt, good quality and reasonable health care to Covid-19 patients. He has himself appealed to the private hospitals to refrain from over charging COVID patients, he stated.

The Minister highlighted that measures have been to ensure accessibility and affordability of all drugs and other therapeutics to all citizens, irrespective of their paying capacities. The Government has taken cognizance of reports of alleged black marketing of drugs like Remdesivir and has asked Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to take suitable action against the same along with their State Counterparts.

Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that the Government is seized of the evolving nature of the infection and emerging evidence of the systemic health complications in those who have been infected. AIIMS and other research institutions have been asked to undertake research to study the long-term impact of COVID. ICMR is establishing a National Clinical Registry on COVID that will provide insights into clinical course of COVID-19 disease, its spectrum and outcome of patients. Expert group consultations are already going on to review the emerging evidence and generate our own data on organ system specific (respiratory system, renal system, cardiovascular and gastro-intestinal) sequelae of COVID, he stated.

The Union Health Minister stated that “NDHM is one of the most ambitious missions of the Government of India and is set to catapult India as a global leader in the field of digital health. However, there are vested interests that do not want India to succeed and are spearheading a disinformation campaign against NDHM.” Allaying fears, he clarified that it is an utter lie that those who do not become part of this system shall not be allowed to access the hospitals. “Those persons or institutions who are not a part of this system shall continue to enjoy access to the healthcare system in exactly the same manner as they are doing now. Participation in the digital health ecosystem shall be totally optional and shall never be made mandatory for individuals”.

To watch the first episode of ‘*Sunday Samvaad*’, please click at the following links:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/drharshvardhan/status/1305067117172072449?s=19>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/drharshvardhanofficial/videos/345933476608657/>

Youtube: <https://youtu.be/wkms035Hlb0>

DHV App: <http://app.drharshvardhan.com/news/14022/sunday-samvaad-|episode-1?articleId=14022>



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(Release ID: 1653777)