

Pvt sector lobbies govt to allow vaccine sale in open market

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The private healthcare industry wants the government to allow the sale of covid-19 vaccines in the open market with strict price control, citing India's slow rate of vaccination.

This follows an agreement to support the vaccination programme under a public-private partnership (PPP) model at a nominal fee.

Last week, stakeholders from the private sector reached out to health minister Harsh Vardhan, telling him how the US has been able to ramp up vaccination despite making similar beginnings as India.

They pointed out that the US began vaccination on 10 December and took 27 days to administer the first seven mil-

lion doses—very similar to India, which began on 16 January and took 26 days.

However, since then, the US has averaged more than a million doses per day, whereas India has managed only 250,000 doses per day. Hesitancy among healthcare and other frontline workers is thought to have slowed down India's pace.

"This should not retard our effort to vaccinate the rest of the population. It is, therefore, time that we fast-track bringing in the 50+ group. Private sector hospitals should be roped in full capacity in the vaccination drive," said Girdhar J. Gyani, director general, Association of Healthcare Providers (India) (AHP), which has recently submitted a proposal to the health ministry.

"Government may also consider facilitating paid vaccina-



CII said opening up the market will also help address the concern that vaccines could be administered after their expiry date. REUTERS

tions by those who can afford it, without compromising any sections of society," he said.

India started vaccination on 16 January and was the first to reach seven million vaccinations in 26 days. But thereafter, India has been averaging 250,000 vaccines a day, while the US has been averaging more than 1.2 million shots

daily.

"While we utilize private sector infrastructure to deliver vaccination as per government scheme, there is an opportunity to jack up vaccination through the open market. The government may allow the vaccine to be procured by designated big private hospitals and deliver to institutional cli-

ents at regulated cost," said Gyani.

The AHP has proposed that, for example, public sector units may decide to vaccinate their employees at cost—as may private companies, educational institutions and banks. This could give a big boost to the drive and reduce the economic burden on the government.

In a similar vein, the high-level task force on covid vaccines constituted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has also suggested that private health providers be allowed to administer vaccines, and that the jobs be made available for anyone to buy in the open market. CII said opening up the mar-

ket will also help address the concern that vaccines could be administered after their expiry date. It recommends that all stakeholders ensure that all the vaccines available in the country are utilized and well before their expiry.

"By opening the vaccination process to the private sector, the large cohort of those willing to take the vaccines would enable full utilization of the vaccines within the expiry period," said T.V. Narendran, president-designate chairman of CII's vaccine task force.

Currently, private healthcare manages over 60% of the overall patients in India, while the government manages the remaining 40%.

Private sector hospitals should be roped in full capacity in the vaccination drive, the AHP has proposed to govt