



DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

LEADING HEALTH, POPULATION AND FAMILY WELFARE STORIES OF THE DAY
Friday 20210319

New Covid cases

32 more die in Punjab as nation sees around 40,000 new Covid cases (The Tribune: 20210319)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/32-more-die-in-punjab-as-nation-sees-around-40-000-new-covid-cases-227526>

41,810 infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on November 29

32 more die in Punjab as nation sees around 40,000 new Covid cases

Police stop a commuter during night curfew imposed by the authorities due to surge in coronavirus cases, in Patiala on Thursday. PTI

India saw 39,726 new coronavirus infections being reported in a day, the highest single day rise recorded so far this year, taking the nationwide COVID-19 tally of cases to 1,15,14,331, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

The daily rise in infections (39,726) was the highest recorded in 110 days, while the death toll increased to 1,59,370 with 154 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Registering an increase for the ninth day in a row, the total active caseload has reached 2,71,282, which now comprises 2.36 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 96.26 per cent, the data stated.

As many as 41,810 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on November 29.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,10,83,679, while the case fatality rate has further to 1.38 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70

lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to ICMR, 23,13,70,546 samples have been tested up to March 18 with 10,57,383 samples being tested on Thursday.

The 154 new fatalities include 58 from Maharashtra, 32 from Punjab and 15 from Kerala.

A total of 1,59,370 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 53,138 from Maharashtra, 12,573 from Tamil Nadu, 12,415 from Karnataka, 10,949 from Delhi, 10,300 from West Bengal, 8,753 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,186 from Andhra Pradesh.

The Health Ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation. PTI

AstraZeneca vaccine

AstraZeneca vaccine safe, will add clot warning: EU agency (The Tribune: 20210319)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/coronavirus/astrazeneca-vaccine-safe-will-add-clot-warning%C2%A0-eu-agency-227128>

AstraZeneca vaccine safe, will add clot warning: EU agency

A person receives a dose of Oxford/AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in Antwerp, Belgium, on March 18, 2021. Reuters

The European Union's drug regulatory agency said Thursday that the AstraZeneca vaccine is not linked to an overall increase in the risk of blood clots and that the benefits of use outweigh the risks, paving the way for European countries to resume administering the shots.

Several European countries had suspended the use of the vaccine over the past week following reports of rare types of blood clots occurring in a small number of the millions of people who had received the shot across the continent.

Germany, France and others had said they wanted to wait for the European Medicines Agency's determination before deciding whether to resume using the vaccine.

"Our scientific position is that this vaccine is a safe and effective option to protect citizens against COVID-19," said the head of the EMA, Emer Cooke.

She added: “If it were me, I would be vaccinated tomorrow”.

However, she said the agency “cannot rule out definitively a link” between the rare types of blood clots and the vaccine. The EMA recommended adding a description of these cases to the vaccine leaflets so health workers and patients would be aware.

Clots that form in the arms, legs or elsewhere can break free and travel to the heart, brain or lungs, causing strokes, heart attacks or other deadly blockages.

While many countries have continued to use the AstraZeneca vaccine, there are concerns the debate could seriously undermine confidence in the shot, which is key to efforts to vaccinate the world’s population, especially in poorer countries.

In Europe, where there is a choice of vaccines, the safety questions have complicated an already slow rollout across the 27-nation EU at a critical moment when infections are rising at an alarming rate again in many countries, in part because of mutant versions of the coronavirus.

Blood clots have been reported in at least 37 people, and at least four deaths among them have been recorded, out of the 17 million who have received at least one dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe.

The World Health Organization has said that there is no evidence to suggest the vaccine was responsible and that the benefits of immunization far outweigh the potentially small risk. The drugmaker likewise said it found no increased risk of clots.

AstraZeneca is expected to apply in the coming weeks for US authorisation for its vaccine. The US now relies on vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

On Thursday, ahead of the EMA’s announcement, Britain’s drug regulatory agency said there was no evidence that AstraZeneca’s vaccine causes clots, and it urged people to continue getting the shot. Britain was not among the countries that suspended use of the vaccine.

The pause in vaccinations with AstraZeneca’s formula comes as tens of thousands of new daily cases have prompted new lockdown measures in Italy, caused hospitalizations in France to spike and led German officials to announce a third surge of COVID-19 has begun.

In yet another setback, British officials said Thursday that the country is facing a shortfall in vaccine deliveries that may delay the start of shots for people under 50 in the coming weeks.

Figures from the European Centers for Disease Prevention and Control this week show there are about 7 million unused doses of the AstraZeneca across the EU.

The German government defended its decision to suspend use of the vaccine, saying it was based on expert advice. Government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said Wednesday that the move could “strengthen trust” in the vaccines.

“Concerns are taken seriously and examined. And as soon as these concerns are cleared up, a vaccine can be used again without hesitation,” she said.

Germany will rely on the EMA decision for how to proceed, Health Ministry spokesman Hanno Kautz said. Other countries including France have also indicated they will follow the advice issued Thursday.

Clinical trials are typically done in tens of thousands of participants. As a result, extremely rare side effects often aren't detected until vaccines are used in many millions of people, long after they have reached the market.

For example, it took nearly a year after vaccination campaigns began against the 2009 swine flu pandemic for European officials to notice an increase in narcolepsy in children and teenagers who got the GlaxoSmithKline vaccine.

"It's right to investigate any potential signals of problems, but you can do that while you continue immunisation," said Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at the University of Southampton. "If we pause the vaccine rollout every time there's a possible signal, it won't be much of a rollout."

Head cautioned that there are costs to going slowly: the longer the coronavirus is allowed to circulate widely, the more chance it has to mutate into a deadlier version.

"People may well be more hesitant to take an AstraZeneca vaccine when immunisation resumes," he said. "And this is at a time when we need to stop the virus circulating to reduce the chances of further variants emerging." — AP

Vaccinate

CM: Can vaccinate all of Delhi in 3 months (Hindustan Times: 20210319)

<https://epaper.hindustantimes.com/Home/ArticleView>

Vaccine drive should be decentralised, age restrictions lifted to give everyone a jab on demand: Kejriwal

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday appealed to the Centre to relax the eligibility criteria for Covid-19 vaccinations, saying that his government can inoculate all adult residents of Delhi within three months to tackle steadily rising infections that have triggered concerns of a fresh wave.

Emphasising that vaccination is the most effective way to control the spread of Covid-19, Kejriwal said that his government will increase daily inoculation capacity from 30,000-40,000 to 125,000 by doubling the number of centres from the existing 500, and extending their timing by four hours.

Health care and frontline workers, along with people over 60 years and those aged at least 45 with specified comorbidities, are currently eligible to get vaccinated in India. The world's largest vaccination drive was launched in the country on January 16, with two vaccines (Covishield and Covaxin) being cleared so far for use.

“The Centre should make vaccines open for all those who are 18 years of age and above. India is producing enough Covid-19 vaccines now to get this done. Walk-in centres should be opened for all. I urge the central government to take this up on a war footing. If this is allowed, we can vaccinate everyone in Delhi (18 years and above) in three months,” Kejriwal said.

Addressing a digital news briefing after holding a review meeting with health minister Satyendar Jain and top officials of the Delhi government, Kejriwal said they will write to the Centre about allowing states to relax the eligibility criteria.

He was speaking a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to chief ministers, stressing on the need to take “decisive action” in an urgent meeting during which the issue of expanding the drive was raised by at least three CMs.

Delhi continued its trend of rising infections on Thursday, with the city reporting 607 new cases, the highest daily infections since January 6. Even though the positivity rate remains low, experts believe the latest spike is a matter of concern and could spark the fourth wave of infections in the Capital if strict measures are not ensured. The seven-day average of cases, which denotes the case trajectory, currently stands at 456, the highest in over two months, or since January 12. This number has now been rising for the past 24 days in the city, which has led to experts saying that it may be the start of the fourth wave of infections in the Capital

“The daily number of Covid-19 cases in Delhi has been increasing over the past three days, but there is no need to panic... Today, in the meeting, I have given strict instructions to intensify our Covid-19 management system of testing, tracing and isolation. Surveillance will be enhanced and the general laxity observed among people in following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour will be addressed by strict enforcement,” Kejriwal said.

A senior official of the Union health ministry said on condition of anonymity: “We are focusing on people who are vulnerable; therefore, in need of the vaccine. Individuals who are vulnerable must be protected first; that's our priority. Vaccine eagerness can become as big a problem as vaccine hesitancy.”

Kejriwal said that if people are vaccinated, there is a good chance that they won't get Covid-19 for a year or so. “Currently, we are vaccinating 30,000-40,000 people in a day and are going to increase it to 125,000 soon. The number of centres will also be doubled from the existing 500. At present, Covid-19 vaccination centres operate from 9am to 5pm, which will be increased to run them from 9am to 9pm every day,” he said.

By Thursday evening, the health department issued two orders directing all hospitals to extend the timings as announced by Kejriwal and for all Delhi government hospitals to increase their vaccination centres from Monday onwards.

Urging the Centre to also relax the parameters for vaccination centres, Kejriwal said that at present, only a few centres are open for 24 hours. “It has been more than two months since the inoculation drive started... So, instead of having a list of categories for the people who are eligible for vaccines, we should have a list of those who are not eligible. Rest all adults should be vaccinated,” he said.

Dr Lalit Kant, former head of the department of epidemiology at the Indian Council of Medical Research, said the Covid-19 numbers are likely to increase further in the coming weeks. “People have stopped following Covid-19 appropriate norms. It is seen most in marketplaces. Intensive campaigns and strict enforcement to ensure mask wearing and social distancing should be carried out,” he said.

The Union health ministry has separately listed out districts in 12 states and Union territories where infections have grown significantly. From a low of under 11,000 cases every day in the second week of February – the lowest levels recorded since the peak of the first wave in country in September last year – India is now again recording over 29,000 new cases a day on a weekly average. On Thursday, it added 39,671 infections, highest since November 28, 2020.

Except for Kerala, Odisha and Bihar, almost all regions are showing an increase in their outbreak, according to the University of Michigan’s India Covid-19 metrics tracker that shows all of the other regions with an R number above 1.

India has so far delivered 38.92 million doses. In the last 24 hours, 1.78 million doses were delivered. “If more centres can be added and they work on a mission mode, we will reduce wastage... Also, keep in mind the expiry date of the vaccine. Use the earlier batches first,” Modi said in the meeting with chief ministers on Wednesday.

BS Vohra, president of the Joint Forum of East Delhi RWAs, said if norms are relaxed, a lot more people can be vaccinated in the coming months, but suggested that the government carry out more campaigns to curtail vaccine hesitancy.

Health Care Services

9am-9pm: Window for jobs to be expanded at govt hospitals (Hindustan Times: 20210319)

<https://epaper.hindustantimes.com/Home/ArticleView>

An elderly couple awaits their turn at a vaccination centre in a Delhi private hospital REUTERS

Keeping vaccination centres open for 12 hours and increasing the number of inoculation sites across the city are two of several measures that the Delhi government said it is taking to increase the number of daily vaccinations from nearly 40,000 now to 125,000.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the Centre to relax the eligibility criteria for Covid-19 vaccine jabs, adding that the state government could inoculate all adult residents of Delhi within three months if it were done.

“The number of centres will also be doubled from 500 right now. At present, Covid-19 vaccination centres operate daily from 9am to 5pm, but their timings will be extended to 9am to 9pm daily,” Kejriwal also said at the press conference.

Towards that end, the Delhi government on Thursday also ordered all its hospitals to extend the timings of their centres from Monday. “It is hereby ordered that with effect from 22.03.2021, all Delhi government hospitals will operate vaccination sites functioning on their premises up to at least 9pm. All facilities will ensure deployment of adequate manpower at these sites to ensure proper functioning of vaccination sites. Non-compliance shall be viewed seriously,” read the order from special secretary (health) SM Ali.

In addition, all Delhi government-run hospitals have also been asked to increase the number of vaccination sites on their premises to at least six. Even the Lok Nayak Hospital currently has five vaccination sites while the Rajiv Gandhi superspeciality hospital has four.

One of the vaccination centres at the 2,000-bed Lok Nayak hospital, which was the biggest Covid-19 treatment facility in Delhi, already runs round the clock. But, this is meant only for frontline workers who can get shot once after their shifts end.

“Currently, we get around 30 to 40 people each day after hours at the centre. Now, everyone in the priority group will be allowed to come between 9am and 9pm to get the shots. From Friday, the hospital will start assessing the space needed for the additional centre and the staff strength to keep it open till 9pm,” said a senior administrative official from the hospital.

Delhi will start immunisations at all its dispensaries next week. “Inspection of dispensaries is complete and in the next couple of days, all of them will start the vaccine drive — people will have centres closer to their homes,” said a senior district official.

There are around 260 dispensaries run by the Delhi government in the city and they currently operate from 9am to 5pm. “We have to check staff availability and other logistical issues before extending the timings of dispensaries,” the official said.

There are, at present, 550 vaccination sites — in 208 hospitals and 40 dispensaries — in Delhi, according to the CoWIN portal. Of them, 325 are in government facilities and 225 in private ones.

The government is now looking to bring on board several private sector hospitals as well.

“One round of inspection has been conducted at several small hospitals and they are likely to be added to the centres’ list next week. We have also got requests from private hospitals to keep centres open on Sundays. That is likely to happen soon,” said another senior district official.

Coronavirus

Coronavirus | U.S. woman gives birth to first known baby with antibodies, doctors say (The Hindu: 20210319)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/woman-gives-birth-to-first-known-baby-with-antibodies-against-coronavirus-doctors-say/article34098042.ece>

The mother had received a single dose of the Moderna mRNA vaccine at 36 weeks of pregnancy.

Pediatricians have reported the first known case of a woman, who was given the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during her pregnancy, giving birth to a baby with antibodies against the novel coronavirus.

According to the yet-to-be peer-reviewed study, posted in the preprint server medRxiv, the mother had received a single dose of the Moderna mRNA vaccine at 36 weeks and three days of her gestation period.

Three weeks later, she gave birth to a vigorous, healthy, full-term girl, whose blood sample taken immediately after birth revealed the presence of antibodies against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the study noted.

"Here, we report the first known case of an infant with SARS-CoV-2 IgG antibodies detectable in cord blood after maternal vaccination," noted the co-authors, Paul Gilbert and Chad Rudnick from Florida Atlantic University in the U.S.

The woman, who has been breastfeeding the baby exclusively, received the second dose of the vaccine as per the normal 28-day vaccination protocol timeline, the doctors noted.

While earlier studies showed that the passage of antibodies from COVID-recovered mothers to their fetuses via the placenta was lower than expected, the current research suggests "potential for protection and infection risk reduction from SARS-CoV-2 with maternal vaccination." However, Gilbert and Rudnick note that further long-term studies are needed to quantify the antibody response in babies born to vaccinated mothers.

"Protective efficacy in newborns and ideal timing of maternal vaccination remains unknown," the pediatricians wrote in the study.

"We urge other investigators to create pregnancy and breastfeeding registries as well as conduct efficacy and safety studies of the COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant and breastfeeding woman and their offspring," they added.

‘Post-vaccine blood clots

‘Post-vaccine blood clots a form of rare cerebral thromboses: European Medicines Agency (The Hindu: 20210319)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/post-vaccine-blood-clots-a-form-of-rare-cerebral-thrombosis-european-medicines-agency/article34086296.ece>

WHO rules out link between AstraZeneca vaccine and clots

Scientists at the Germany-based Paul-Ehrlich-Institut report that the blood clots observed in some of those vaccinated are a “special form of very rare cerebral vein thrombosis”. This corresponds to a deficiency in platelets and bleeding following vaccination with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. The recommendations from the institute were the reason Germany put on hold ongoing vaccinations until a full review by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The EMA last week said that several cases of immune thrombocytopenia, a lack of platelets in the blood that can lead to bleeding and bruising, had been reported under its vaccine safety monitoring process.

Several EU countries — France and Italy for instance — have called a halt to the AstraZeneca vaccine after reports from Denmark and Norway of possible serious side-effects, including bleeding and blood clots.

EU nations suspend use

Denmark was the first country to suspend the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on March 11 as a precautionary measure. Iceland and Norway followed suit.

Also read: Major EU nations halt AstraZeneca as WHO says it is safe

Last Friday, Bulgaria suspended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as it probed caused the death of a woman with several underlying conditions who was inoculated. Sweden and Latvia, too, have suspended use.

The blood clots observed post vaccination, however, are less than the background number of such thrombosis events even without vaccination. The World Health Organization (WHO) has ruled out any link between AstraZeneca’s vaccine against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and reported blood clots.

“We do not want people to panic and we would, for the time being, recommend that countries continue vaccinating with AstraZeneca,” WHO Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan was quoted as saying by news agency AFP.

India also is reliant on Covishield, which is based on the AstraZeneca vaccine, and forms the bulk of the nearly 30 million vaccines that have been so far administered to the population. However, officials say no instances of such blood clots have been reported so far.

“I would wait for the complete report from the EMA on the nature of these blood clots. Whether it is a ‘special form’ or a rare one needs to be analysed but so far there’s no valid reason to take steps to halt the drive in India,” said Samiran Panda, Head, Epidemiology & Communicable Diseases Division, Indian Council of Medical Research.

Pandemic

A Test of Faith: Polls amidst Pandemic (The Indian Express: 20210319)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/assembly-polls-ec-model-code-of-conduct-7234611/>

Along with the raging virus, the ECI will have to deal with threats of violence in the upcoming elections to state assemblies

The ECI retains its objective of “safe and enhanced participation” in the pandemic context as it did for Bihar. The make-or-break stakes in the forthcoming elections are best reflected in curious alliances and extreme positionings and the pressure can only be accentuated as seat sharing and nominations proceed.

The announcement of the Model Code of Conduct should force a semblance of peace and sanity in the super-charged atmosphere in poll-bound Assam, Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, especially West Bengal where passionate dispute tends to aggravate to violence. About 187 million electors, a fifth of India’s electorate, are poised to vote in 824 assembly constituencies while all states are simultaneously engaged in a desperate bid to ramp up vaccination and block the coronavirus mutants.

It seemed that the electoral system had successfully seen through the COVID fire with the Bihar polls a few months ago, but the pandemic refuses to leave the election scene. India is in the middle of the world’s largest vaccination drive with a target to inoculate a critical 300 million by July. This has demanded constant scaling up of operations.

The provision of early jabs for election officials is an indicator of the special situation under which the upcoming elections are to be conducted. It’s not surprising that COVID protocols constitute a large chunk of the ECI’s press note. A staggering 2.7 lakh booths have been mobilised for polling from March 27 to April 29, mainly to reduce the burden of voters from

1,500 to 1,000 per station and an extra hour has been allowed for voting, both as parts of a COVID protocol that was earlier tried out in Bihar. The addition in polling stations is as much as about 90 per cent in Kerala.

Sharp and often polarising discourses centring around development, corruption, law and order, ideology and identity, the CAA, farm laws and local issues hold sway depending on the turf, but the virus remains the unavoidable backdrop. However, there is surely much more in the hands of election managers than gloves and sanitisers.

If the eight-phase polling for West Bengal is unprecedented, so is the aggression and bitterness amongst the major contenders, besides the history of electoral violence in the politically-vibrant state. West Bengal has an elector-population ratio of 0.68 that is well ahead of the national average. The state has added about 8 million electors over the 2016 elections for its 294 seats, making the task that much more complex. Amidst anticipation of action and preventive action, the Election Commission has clarified that the advance deployment of central police force is for all poll-going states, and not for West Bengal alone. Reports suggest that a large number of booths have been identified as sensitive in West Bengal, and several in Assam as well, where enough fault lines exist to create volatile situations across its 126 constituencies.

Vulnerability is decided through a detailed review and feedback system well before the polls to locate any apprehensions of intimidation or undue influence. Identified areas will be understandably under EC's active watch, where a plethora of specially-appointed observers will maintain a hawk's eye besides the usual set of central observers, police observers and expenditure observers.

The opting for single-phase poll in all southern states and multi-phase in the east is a pointer to the prevailing security concerns. The initiative of large-scale webcasting of the polling process combined with deployment of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) across all polling stations can be a shot in the arm for transparency, instilling confidence in the process. The new digital media guidelines of the central government should come

immediately handy for election managers to deal with this slippery area of campaign regulation. The full Election Commission has already visited all four states and the UT during the last few weeks to take stock of the ground situation.

Interestingly Tamil Nadu, with equally feisty politics, and politically-aligned electorate, has never been troubled by any significant level of violence. Intrusion of money power, and not violence, has been the issue in the contest for its 234 seats. Electoral inducements including cash and alcohol have dented Tamil Nadu's otherwise colourful campaigns often involving cinestars, many of whom have moved into direct political action this time around.

Elections in Aravakurichi and Thanjavur constituencies were postponed in 2016 due to reports of distribution of huge sums of money and gifts to voters. During the last Lok Sabha polls, Tamil Nadu topped the list of states with seizures of cash, liquor, narcotics, gold, silver etc. worth Rs 952 crore. Of this, precious metals alone were to the tune of Rs 710 crore. ECI's flying squads will be expected to do a lot of hard work once again.

The infection of material inducement has not spilled over to the adjacent state of Kerala. However, competition in the state's 140 seats, abetted by both traditional and evolving social dynamics, has been tough on every occasion with a discerning electorate facing up to a range of skilled leaders.

Polls in Puducherry, traditionally an extension of the politics of neighbouring Tamil Nadu, has been spiced up by the sudden and dramatic developments earlier this month, with these resonating in the campaign.

The four states and Puducherry have belonged to the high turnout zone, notching around 70 per cent footfall, election after election, whether for Lok Sabha or Assembly. The voting has moved several points ahead in the last decade, nudged by ECI's focused intervention, SVEEP, which pushes for citizens' engagement. In 2016, all five elections got past the 75 per cent turnout level while Assam registered a record 85 per cent voting and West Bengal was a little behind with 83 per cent.

The ECI retains its objective of "safe and enhanced participation" in the pandemic context as it did for Bihar. The make-or-break stakes in the forthcoming elections are best reflected in curious alliances and extreme positionings and the pressure can only be accentuated as seat sharing and nominations proceed. On the date of counting, May 2, certain political groups and leaders may be staring at political survival. The poll managers, for whom Bihar was a litmus test, will once again have to shield the sacredness of the franchise not only from the coronavirus but more importantly from violence.

One fervently hopes this round of the country's democratic exercise does not get hotter than the advancing summer and the faith and pride in the ballot remains unshaken for everyone.

WHO

Benefits outweigh the risks of AstraZeneca COVID shot as review continues – WHO (The Times of India: 20210319)

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/health-news/benefits-outweigh-the-risks-of-astrazeneca-covid-shot-as-review-continues-who/articleshow/81582513.cms>

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that it considers that the benefits of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine outweigh its risks and recommends that vaccinations continue.

The WHO listed AstraZeneca and Oxford University's vaccine for emergency use last month, widening access to the relatively inexpensive shot in the developing world.

More than a dozen European countries have suspended use of the vaccine this week amid concerns.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA), which will release its findings on Thursday, has said it was investigating reports of 30 cases of unusual blood disorders out of 5 million recipients of the AstraZeneca vaccine. In total, 45 million COVID shots have been delivered across the region.

The WHO said its Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety is carefully assessing the latest available safety data for the AstraZeneca vaccine.

“Once that review is completed, WHO will immediately communicate the findings to the public,” WHO said in its statement a day after its experts met.

“At this time, WHO considers that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine outweigh its risks and recommends that vaccinations continue,” it added.

Mike Ryan, WHO’s top emergency expert, told a social media event: “We would advise people to keep taking the vaccines. Right now this virus has a much bigger chance of doing you a lot of harm than the very, very potentially tiny risks associated with this vaccine.”

Ryan, referring to the AstraZeneca shot, said: “I think we need to be very careful that we don’t end up over-reacting and damaging the product in people’s mind until we are absolutely sure that there actually is a problem. Right now, that is not certain. Let’s wait for the data to be looked at before we make any conclusions.”

Kate O’Brien, director of WHO’s department of immunization, said that its panel was assessing whether adverse events such as blood clots were actually related to vaccination.

“We should not over-interpret these specific numbers that come out of trials. They are highly effective vaccines, they are life-saving vaccines, they are safe vaccines and we should get on with deploying them,” O’Brien told a news conference.

End of the article

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90s trends set by Karisma Kapoor that Gen Z is currently obsessed with

Fueled by nostalgia, Gen Z seems to have found reclusive trends from the 90s and noughties. We bring to you some of the hottest trends rocked by Karisma Kapoor which are seeing their resurgence now

The sad story of Mumbai’s Litti Chokha seller is soul-stirring

Recently, a Twitter user took to his social media account and shared the plight of a Litti Chokha seller in the Versova beach area with a motive to help him. Have a look at his tweet.

The era of conscious luxury is here

The ethical valuation of luxury brands is the ticket to go for in the post-pandemic world to keep it upscaled. When you go through the annual fashion reports of legitimate associations and the predictions on future benefits, the mentions are all about plastic recycling, chemical-free productions, sustainable industrial infrastructure, and the historically narrowed down path that led to global warming.