



# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

## Community Awareness on COVID-19

# INTRODUCTION

The ongoing outbreak of infection by severe acute respiratory syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), known as COVID-19, aroused the attention of the entire world. Its arrival has unprecedentedly transformed many lives across the globe. India is among the list of worst affected countries from COVID-19. As of June 27, 2021, it has infected more than crore people causing 3.97 lakh deaths in the country. The studies suggest that there is adequate awareness for COVID-19 and its preventive measures among the people in India. The government has organized campaigns to make people aware of the COVID-19 and its preventive measures. However, still, a lot of awareness needs to be disseminated.

The vaccination program began on January 16, 2021 in India and it has surpassed over 300 million vaccine doses administered in total as of June 23, 2021. Although the vaccination program is going at a rapid rate in the country; there is still a large proportion left to get vaccinated.

According to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 52% of the elderly population (above 60 years) of the country is yet to even receive their first dose. But what is even more worrying is that there is a drop in the pace of vaccination in this age group.

According to the experts, the major reason behind this drop is the vaccine hesitancy among the people. Facebook's COVID-19 symptom Survey (CSS) in India has found that the vaccine hesitancy rate is around 28.7% with variations across states and union territories (UTs). As per the CSS, the vaccine hesitancy rate is as high as 42% in Tamil Nadu and 41% in Punjab.

The 'Voices from the Field' Document is a part of the survey conducted on the topic **"Knowledge Survey: Community Awareness on COVID-19"** by

the World Health Organization (WHO), India in collaboration with the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). The analysis of the survey brings to surface interesting results on the awareness level of the community on COVID symptoms, COVID appropriate behavior (CAB) and vaccine issues (safety/ hesitancy). The total landing counts of the survey was 11, 015.

The results show that the majority of respondents are aware of the three common COVID-19 symptoms viz. **Fever (81%), Cough (62%) and Difficulty in Breathing (59%)**. **91% have responded to wearing mask, 86% each to washing hands and maintaining physical distance. 45% of the respondents do not know the correct COVID Helpline Number. Despite the second COVID-19 wave, 47% still perceived low COVID-19 Risk.**

With respect to the vaccine issues, the majority (97%) are aware of its availability. 95% of the population will follow CABs even after being vaccinated. 49% of the respondents who do not want to get vaccinated have sighted that they have concerns on its side effects and 23% doubt its effectiveness and 25% females are worried in taking vaccine during pregnancy, lactation and in older age groups (especially in rural background). The results obtained would help devise interventions and innovative campaigns to bust vaccine related myths/ hesitancies and others.

The document comprehensively covers the 'narratives' of the community from the ten districts **(New Delhi/ Gurgaon, Jodhpur, Pune, Nasik, Hyderabad, Ghaziabad, Amritsar, Kolkata, Bareilly and Cuttack)** from where the maximum responses were captured. Their statements have been captured through telephonic interviews, to gauge an understanding of community awareness, challenges faced, vaccine awareness, hesitancy and safety concerns.

## Let's read their opinions on COVID awareness and vaccine!

The control of the COVID-19 pandemic depends largely on the awareness level of the communities, and how strictly they follow the COVID preventive measures. After almost 6 months of the vaccination drive, there are diverse opinions of the residents on administering the vaccine.

Some consider it as totally safe and an important precaution to reduce the impact of COVID-19, while others have several hesitations on taking it. This document contains the narratives of the respondents from different age-groups, covering diverse opinions on COVID-19 vaccines, COVID-19 impact and the other challenges faced. This can be substantiated by the evidence given below.



**"I got infected with COVID-19 in the second wave. It was very severe. Some of the common symptoms were heavy chest, fever and loss of smell. I have taken both the doses of COVID-19 Vaccine without any hesitation. I felt body pain and head ache after it, but it was normal. There were some challenges in taking the first dose, as there was shortage of vaccine, but the second dose was easily available.**

**I want to add that, India is a very good country in terms of vaccination like we have seen in Polio. India has successfully done that. The only thing that needs more attention is to sensitize the community on taking the vaccine. If we want to eradicate this third wave, we have to vaccinate around more than 100 crore people. Also, there is a need to take all the preventive measures even after taking the vaccine and go outside only when needed"**

**-Keshav, Post graduate student, Hyderabad**

“Thankfully, I have never been infected with COVID-19. I haven't taken the vaccine yet because it is not available for the below 18 age-group. I don't have any hesitation in taking the vaccine. If it is available now, I would take it.

I am very careful and taking the precautionary measures of COVID-19. We never go out. Only my father goes out for office purpose, for groceries or any other important stuff. After buying grocery, we always clean everything and follow all the necessary precautions”

*-K.P. Malavika, 1<sup>st</sup> year Intermediate Student, Hyderabad*



“I haven't been infected with COVID-19 yet though I am fully aware of the COVID-19 symptoms like common cold, shortness of breath, weakness in the body, etc. I completely avoid going to crowded places unless it is very necessary. I take all the precautionary measures but I am afraid of COVID-19 as I have not been vaccinated yet.

Earlier, I faced a lot of confusion like which vaccine is better; Covaxin or Covishield and I was concerned about its side effects too. I think there is a great need to spread awareness about it. There are many people here in my hometown who are hesitant to take vaccine because they are hearing weird stuffs like body will become magnetic, people are dying because of vaccine etc. through Whatsapp forwards. This is very common in people who are about 45 years of age. They are being misled by a lot of different sources and that is why awareness campaigns are really necessary to bust these myths”

*-Rajat Sharma, Teacher, Pune*



"I haven't been infected with COVID-19 yet and I haven't taken the vaccine. I have no hesitancy in taking the vaccine; also there are no accessibility issues. I am planning to take it by looking at my leaves by keeping in mind the side effects in case if it is there. I am following all the precautionary measures of COVID-19 and I am aware about it"

*-Akhilesh Arvind Solanki, IT Professional, Pune*



"I was infected with COVID in the first wave. The symptoms were fever, Cough, lack of smell, lack of taste, weakness. I immediately visited the doctor and started taking medicine. I also went to do the RTPCR test to the nearby hospital. There were not many facilities then. I have taken the vaccine and there was no hesitancy related to vaccine. There was no difficulty in taking the first dose of the vaccine. I went to the centre and they immediately gave me the vaccine. They were even saying then that no one come to take the vaccine. But the situation is completely different now. While during the second dose, I did face some difficulties as they was lack of availability of the vaccine. I felt no side-effects of the vaccine.

Vaccine should be available as soon as possible, I am trying to vaccinate my daughter but I couldn't find yet. We also do not get clear information about the vaccine and priority. Whenever we ask the health centers for information, they also give us wrong information. There is also corruption happening as they are taking money in government places and giving the priority accordingly. This should stop".

*-Dipali Biswas Singh, Housewife, Kolkata*

**“I was infected with COVID in the first wave and the common symptoms were fever, lack of smell, weakness and cough. I haven’t taken the vaccine yet. Earlier I wasn’t fitting into the age group for vaccination but recently when they have started vaccination for the above 18 age-groups, we are facing a lot of issues as vaccines are not available. There is a long queue for vaccination and there is a lobby thing going on here. We went with our family members but there were long queues because of the limited quantity of vaccine, so it was not possible.**

**I have no hesitation in taking the vaccine and I agree that there is a need to follow COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviour even after one gets vaccinated”.**

***-Smaranika Singh, Post Graduate, Kolkata***



**“No, I wasn’t infected with COVID-19 in any of the waves. But, I am fully aware of the symptoms like Sore throat, fever, Cough, loose motion, breathlessness. I haven’t taken the vaccine yet as there were COVID patients in my home around May. Because already I was so exposed at that time that’s why I didn’t want to take the risk. Actually, if it’s available now, I don’t have any problem in taking it. There is a slight difficulty now as the slots are not available. I also don’t have any hesitation regarding the vaccine. But yes, there is hesitancy and rumours among people regarding vaccine, so people try to avoid taking it”.**

***-Pooja Sanwale, Public Health Professional, Nashik***



"Neither I nor my family members were infected with COVID-19 in any of the waves. I don't know much about the symptoms of COVID-19 I know a few of them like fever, breathing problem and lack of smell. I haven't taken the vaccine yet, will take in the next month. There is no such reason for not taking the vaccine. I am looking for job right now and because of that will take some time to get vaccinated. So, we have decided as a family that in the next we all will take the vaccine.

No, I don't have any hesitancy in taking the vaccine. Because institutions like AIMS and other big institutions have cleared the vaccine. They have told that it is safe, so we do not have any hesitation. If the institutions have asked us not to take, then there would have been hesitancy.

Yes, earlier the vaccines were not there but now it is available but I haven't booked my slot yet and will do that in the next month. But in some places in Nashik, when I see in social media, I see those facing difficulties. Also there is a need to bust myths on vaccine hesitancy.

My concern is that if we are affected from Corona, the whole family gets disturbed both physically as well as mentally. So, we should always follow the precautionary measures for our own as well as our family's safety. Even if we get vaccinated, I will follow the precautionary measures because even after taking the vaccine we might get affected from COVID".

*-Ritesh Khandijod, Graduate, Nashik*



"I along with 4 other members in my family got infected with COVID-19. Yes, I have taken the vaccine. There were not much side effects, I just had fever. The doctor asked me to rest and take paracetamol only. No, I didn't have any hesitancy regarding the vaccine. I do follow all the precautionary measures of COVID-19 even after vaccination".

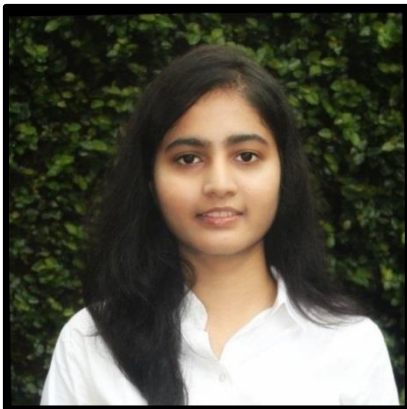
*-Ikbal Singh, Amritsar*





**“Yes, I was infected with COVID-19 along with one other family member. The symptoms were fever, cough, body pain, throat pain and tastelessness. I have taken the vaccine and I had fever & pain after taking it. I wasn't hesitant in taking the vaccine. I do follow the precautionary measures like wearing mask, using sanitizer, washing hands etc. even after taking the vaccine”.**

***-Balwindar Kaur, Amritsar***



**“No, I didn't get infect with COVID-19. I have taken the first dose of the vaccine. There were very few side effects after taking the vaccine like a bit of weakness and some pain on my hand. I had some health issues, so I was a bit reluctant initially because of the side effects of the vaccine, but then I took it. I didn't face any difficulty in getting the vaccine and as I was well aware about its procedure”**

***-Somya, Post-graduate, Delhi***



**“No, I haven't been infected with COVID-19. There is no one infected with COVID-19 in our Juggi area not even a kid. We are not even infected with fever or cough. We don't have any fear because we work as a ragpicker. We roam openly and don't wear mask when nearby, we wear mask only when we go out. Neither I nor anyone will take the vaccine here as no one is infected with COVID-19”.**

***-Vinod Sharma, Rag-picker, Ghaziabad***

**"No one is infected with COVID-19 here. I do follow the precautionary measures of COVID-19 like wearing mask and using hand sanitizer. We are not facing any issue and we don't have any health issues as well, so why should we take the vaccine. Not a single person here is infected with COVID-19 here".**

**-Priyanka, Ghaziabad, Rag-picker**



**"I wasn't infected with COVID-19 in any of the waves. No, I haven't taken the vaccine yet. One of the doctors in the village had died after taking the vaccine which created hesitancy and fear that something might happen if we take the vaccine. Yes, I do follow all the precautionary measures of COVID-19 like washing hands and using sanitizers".**

**-Pramod, Bareilly, Labour**



**"No, I haven't been infected with COVID-19. I haven't taken the vaccine yet because I am a diabetic as well as a heart patient. Yes, there is a fear that something might happen if we take the vaccine. The reason behind this fear is that one of the Doctor's in the village had died after taking the vaccine."**

**-Beena, Bareilly, Labour**



"No, I wasn't infected with COVID-19 in any of the waves. I have taken both the doses of the vaccine. Yes, there were side effects like I had fever and body pain after both the vaccine doses. There wasn't any hesitancy regarding the vaccine. The vaccine was available easily, so I didn't face any difficulty. Yes, I do follow the precautionary measures after taking both the doses like washing hands regularly, wearing double mask while going out, using sanitizers and following the physical distancing. I would also like to add that there is a need to make people aware regarding the vaccine as there is a hesitancy among people regarding the vaccine even among the educated groups".

*-Ankit Mishra, Cuttack, Post-graduate*



"I wasn't infected with COVID-19 but some of my close friends did get infected. Yes, I have taken the first dose and will take the second dose in next 2-3 days. There were not any side effects other than the pain on the hand where I got the vaccine. No, there wasn't any hesitancy regarding the vaccine as my family members have taken their doses and I had also read about the vaccine earlier. There was a bit difficulty in beginning to get the vaccine due to unavailability but later it was available. Yes, I do follow all the COVID-19 precautionary measures even after taking the vaccine".

*-Jeet Singh, Jodhpur, Student*



## Conclusion

The interviews conducted with the community residing in New Delhi/ Gurgaon, Jodhpur, Pune, Nasik, Hyderabad, Ghaziabad, Amritsar, Kolkata, Bareilly and Cuttack captures different views on vaccine issues and community awareness. It is seen that almost all the interviewees are aware of the COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviours (CAB) and they follow it regularly.

**Though the majority of the interviewees feel safe taking the vaccine but many of them are hesitant in taking it.** Many of them cited unavailability of vaccine and corruption as some of the challenges faced. **Narratives show that the community still blindly believes on the Whatsapp forwards regarding the vaccine safety issues.**

**Narratives show that the reluctance in taking the vaccine is more common among the individuals working in the informal sector (like rag pickers, labour etc.).** They don't want to take the vaccine and perceive very low risk of getting infected with COVID-19. Also, there are very much concerned about the side-effects of the vaccine like it may cause death, or it is unsafe for diabetic individuals.

Hence, there is a great need to sensitize and train the community through innovative campaigns on the trusted sources of information, fake news and rumor management, busting vaccine myths and hesitancies.

## References

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