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**Vaccination record**

Pakistan’s vaccination record is terrible compared to other countries in the South Asian region on a per capita basis. It is hard to know how the government and the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) are planning to vaccinate Pakistan’s 220 million population as right now they do not seem to have a plan.

Covid vaccines have been around since December 2020 and now April 2021 is coming to an end; yet after 4-5 months Pakistan has been able to vaccinate only roughly 0.5 percent of its population. At this rate, it would take 10 years for Pakistan to vaccinate all its adult population, according to one estimate.

Vaccination is considered the most important public health intervention to stop the spread of Covid. Yet, Pakistan seems to be inching towards lockdowns till the filing of this article rather than inoculating its citizens. As pointed out in the section of the press, lockdowns are much more disruptive to citizens’ normal life than vaccination.

Lockdowns also cost more in terms of economic and social opportunities lost than vaccination. However, the NCOC – that is a huddle of the country’s top civil and military leadership – seems paralyzed rather than moving fast to provide cover to citizens against the coronavirus.

Pakistan had administered 1.3 million doses of the Covid vaccine till recently, compared to Bangladesh (with much less population) 6.62 million doses and India’s 123 million doses (with its population being only close to six times bigger than Pakistan). It just shows you how much Pakistan is lagging behind compared to its neighbours.

India is going through a terrible second wave of Covid which has been mismanaged like India’s first wave of Covid due to the BJP’s Modi’s “megalomaniac” leadership according to historian Ramachandra Guha. Pakistan had a bad start of the first wave of Covid but did reasonably well to contain the virus and the NCOC seemed to have had a handle on the disease last year which it has lost now in the current wave of Covid-19. Despite India’s terrible management of the pandemic it has shown how poor countries can prioritize vaccinating their populations.

Bangladesh whose population is 163 million (compared to Pakistan’s 220 million) has given at least one dose of vaccine to 3.5 percent of its population while 0.6 percent of its population is fully vaccinated with the administration of a total 6.62 million doses.

Pakistan with its total doses of 1.3 million has performed six times worse than Bangladesh, despite having 57 million more citizens than its former half. The US has administered 206 million doses (with some estimates stating that half of the US population has received the first dose and one quarter are fully vaccinated); China has administered 188 million doses; India 123 million doses; and the UK 42.1 million doses. Even while one discounts the higher prevalence of vaccination in the developed world due to their financial, technical, and scientific resources, Pakistan’s vaccination performance is bad even in the South Asian region as stated above.

One can view Pakistan’s lackluster record on Covid vaccination in terms of the number of doses being administered every day. According to the ‘Our World in Data’ website, Bangladesh administered 136,029 doses on April 15 compared to Pakistan’s 40,000 according to an estimate from another source (Our World in Data’s latest entry for Pakistan is as of March 31, with 26,471 doses). Compare that with India’s 3 million doses per day, China’s 3.37 million doses per day, Turkey’s 213,144 doses per day, Indonesia’s 230,058 doses per day, and Mexico’s 396,285 doses per day to cite some examples. It gives you an idea of Pakistan’s Covid vaccination record compared to other developing countries even in other regions of the world.

According to Bill Bryson’s popular science book ‘The Body’ (2019); vaccination is a really effective way to induce resistance in the human body which produces the needed antibodies to fight off disease without making the host unwell.

Bryson cites Kinch to state wisdom in pre-Covid days that has become well-known now, “we are really no better prepared for a bad outbreak today than we were when Spanish flu killed tens of millions of people a hundred years ago. The reason we haven’t had another experience like that isn’t because we have been especially vigilant. It’s because we have been lucky.” This speaks well for Pakistan as well!

The flu vaccine may be only partially successful but other deadly diseases such as diphtheria, measles and polio have been brought under control in the world due to vaccination. According to one view, vaccination has saved more lives in the 20th century than even antibiotics. According to another view, better hygiene, sanitation and diet have also contributed immensely to bringing diseases under control.

Ignoring scientific thinking and logic, Pakistani decision-makers seem to be relying on luck and gifts for its lackluster vaccination drive for its citizens against the coronavirus. As has been shown above with the help of data, Pakistan seems to be really lagging behind both others in the South Asian region as well as developing countries in other parts of the world.

It is highly irresponsible not to prioritize the vaccination of Pakistan’s population both on health and economic terms. It has and could lead to further loss of innocent lives and damage our economy further. It is about time Pakistan’s leadership pulls up its socks and rethinks its Covid vaccination strategy on an urgent basis.

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