

Sansad TV Perspective: Vaccine Hesitancy: Global Concern

In the series Sansad TV Perspective, we bring you an analysis of the discussion featured on the insightful programme 'Perspective' on Sansad TV, on various important topics affecting India and also the world. This analysis will help you immensely for the [IAS exam](#), especially the mains exam, where a well-rounded understanding of topics is a prerequisite for writing answers that fetch good marks.

In this article, we feature the discussion on the topic: Vaccine Hesitancy.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/s12OC32riuc>

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Guests:

- Sunil Raina, Advisor, World Health Network & Covid Action Group Expert member Goarn, WHO
- Mekhala Chandra, Senior Consultant, Department of Internal Medicine, Sutter Medical Centre, Sacramento, California, USA
- Shashank Joshi, Member, Covid-19 Task Force, Maharashtra

Context:

- Novak Djokovic has been deported from Australia after losing a judicial bid to stay in the country. Judges rejected a challenge by the unvaccinated tennis star after the government cancelled his visa on "health and good order" grounds.
- This deportation saga involving the tennis star has brought to light the issue of vaccine hesitancy. Given that global sports stars are role models for a vast section of the population, such behaviour could send the wrong signal to the people on the need to get vaccinated and could undermine the global vaccination campaign.

Vaccine Hesitancy:

- Vaccine hesitancy refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccine services.
- Notably, vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon. Such vaccine hesitancy has been observed previously too in the case of polio and measles vaccination drives as well. However, the health crisis brought out by the [COVID-19](#) pandemic has only brought this issue into the limelight.
- Ironically, vaccine hesitancy has been high among the developed countries despite having higher educational levels among the people. As per WHO estimates, despite the availability of vaccines

in developed countries like the U.S. and the U.K., the vaccine coverage continues to be low in these countries due to vaccine hesitancy.

- In the USA, 25% of the population is yet to opt for the first dose of the COVID-19 pandemic, while in Britain the not vaccinated proportion of the population stands at 23%.
- In Eastern Mediterranean nations, the unvaccinated population stands at 50%.
- In Germany, a portion of the population is considering emigrating to other countries in opposition to the vaccine mandate.
- There have also been large scale protests against mandatory vaccination laws in countries like France.
- In India, while 94% of the eligible population has been vaccinated, still 7 crore people are reluctant to get vaccines. Also, a considerable proportion of the population is still to take up the second dose.
- The [World Health Organization](#) has described vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 health challenges/concerns in the coming future.

Concerns:

- Amid the ongoing [Omicron](#) surge, there have been reports pointing to the unvaccinated population driving the current surge in COVID-19 cases in Europe and US.
- Large scale vaccine hesitancy could drag the pandemic longer by ensuring sustained continuance of the COVID-19 diseases and emergence of newer and deadlier variants.

Causes for vaccine hesitancy:

- There are many reasons for vaccine scepticism. Vaccine hesitancy is complex and context specific varying across time, place and vaccines.
- The conspiracy theories on social media have brought negative publicity for vaccination. These seem to have created a propaganda against the vaccines.
- The sensationalization of reports on vaccine adverse events by the media is driving vaccine hesitancy to some extent.
- In some places religious factors have driven vaccine hesitancy resulting in myth against vaccines.
- The frequent flip-flops by governments on the vaccination issue has resulted in a low trust among the general populace regarding vaccination. This has only accentuated the negative information on vaccines.
- Vaccine hesitancy is also influenced by factors such as complacency, convenience and confidence.

Arguments against vaccine mandate:

- The compulsory vaccination mandate goes against the freedom of choice of individuals who do not want to get vaccinated.

Arguments in favour of vaccine mandate:

- Though the vaccine mandate on the outset appears to go against a person's freedom of choice, a deeper understanding of the issue reveals that not taking up vaccines by the sceptics goes against another person's right to good health given the fact that no one is safe until everyone is safe.
- Given that all humans share a common space, the decision to not get vaccinated by a section of the population would undermine the interests of others sharing the common spaces.
- Universal vaccination coverage will help boost immunity against the disease and will thus help save precious lives. It will also help reduce load on the stretched healthcare sector.
- Universal vaccination will help reduce the chances of evolution of new variants and could help end the pandemic.
- Vaccination is not only beneficial at the individual level but also at the community and national levels as well.

Recommendations:

- The only way to overcome vaccine hesitancy is by quelling the misinformation campaign through scientific communication on the benefits of vaccination. The concerned authorities should provide scientific evidence to counter any false information regarding vaccine usage. There is the need to dispel all misinformation - unscientific, incorrect and unsubstantiated. Information dissemination is key in the battle against vaccine hesitancy.
- The fact that vaccines meet the necessary safety standards set by the various organizations needs to be highlighted. They have been cleared by developed countries after thorough analysis.
- Notably, vaccination has been around for some time now. Children in all countries undergo routine vaccination. This in itself is a proof of the safety of vaccines and hence there should be no room for vaccine hesitancy.
- It becomes important to highlight the success observed in large countries like India and South Africa due to the vaccination programmes, wherein despite rapid rise in cases the hospitalization and death rates remain within controllable limits.
- There is a need to actively reach out to people and indulge in passing of presumptive information to people.
- Doubts regarding the fast development of the vaccines need to be addressed by showcasing the recent improvement in technology which has made rapid development of vaccines a reality. This needs to be communicated to the vaccine sceptics.
- The media should indulge in responsive reporting especially in cases involving reports of adverse events of vaccination.

- Apart from addressing the vaccine hesitancy issue, it is also equally important to address the issue of vaccine inequity. There is the need to ensure access of affordable, quality and timely vaccines to all.

Conclusion:

- Vaccine is the best bet to end the pandemic and end the misery brought by the pandemic and fighting the vaccine hesitancy issue along with ensuring equitable access is critical to ensure universal vaccination.

