




Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

 **Breastfeeding mothers should get themselves vaccinated against COVID-19 without any hesitation: Dr. Samiran Panda, Head, Division of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases, ICMR**

 **“Vaccines available now are largely effective against the new variants of COVID-19”**

COVID19 virus may reach its endemic stage after a while, like Influenza: Dr. Panda

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Breastfeeding mothers should get themselves vaccinated against COVID-19 without any hesitation. The anti-bodies that are developed in the mother as a result of the vaccination get passively transferred to the baby while breastfeeding and could be helpful to the child, says Shri Samiran Panda, Head, Division of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases, Indian Council for Medical Research.



The vaccines available now are largely effective against the new variants of COVID19

Many people are concerned whether our vaccines will be effective against the newer strains of SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to Dr. Panda, the vaccines available now largely are effective against the new variants. He further explains, vaccines are not infection preventing, but disease-modifying. Experiments at ICMR have proved that the vaccines presently available in India are effective against the new variants as well. However, the efficacy may differ for different strains.

People are also wary that the vaccines that they are receiving now may not be effective after a while, as the virus is mutating rapidly. However, Dr. Panda points out that mutation is normal for all viruses when they proliferate. Experts suggest that the COVID-19 virus will reach its endemic stage like Influenza after a while and then vulnerable population may have to take the vaccine shot annually. Dr. Panda explains Influenza commonly known as flu was a pandemic 100 years ago but today it is endemic. Similarly, in case of COVID-19, we expect that it will gradually become endemic from its current state of being a pandemic. Currently, we recommend the elderly to take annual flu shots. As the influenza virus keeps on mutating, we simultaneously make minor changes in the vaccine. So, there is no need to panic.

It is futile to go for anti-body tests: Dr. Samiran Panda

Dr. Samiran Panda further says that it is futile to go for anti-body tests as the immunity does not depend only on anti-bodies. He adds, the anti-bodies that are seen using the commercial kits available in the market are not necessarily the anti-bodies that can protect from COVID disease. Dr. Panda explains that whenever a person gets vaccinated, two types of immunity emerge. One is known as neutralizing anti-body or anti-body mediated immunity. Second one

is cell mediated immunity. Third one and the most important one is immune memory. An immune memory is generated after vaccination and is present in cells and whenever the virus enters the body, this gets activated.



“Vaccines are absolutely safe”

Dr. Samiran Panda clarifies that people with normal allergies like asthma, dust allergy, allergy of pollen grains etc. can take the vaccine. Patients with co-morbidities can take the vaccine if they are stable. It is advisable for people suffering from diabetes and other immunosuppressed conditions to get vaccinated because they are at a higher risk. “All the vaccines that are currently available in India have gone through three phases of clinical trials. Safety is tested in the first phase itself. Immunity and efficacy are tested in the later phases. So, I assure everyone that the vaccines are absolutely safe.” Dr. Panda added that blood clotting events or AEFI (Adverse Event Following Immunization) following COVID vaccination are miniscule in India.

Dr. Panda also suggests that the best option is to take the vaccine available in the country now, rather than waiting for other vaccines that are available globally and may come to India after some time. Dr. Panda explains, please understand that while people may be waiting for other vaccines which they may consider more convenient or superior, the virus is not waiting. The virus is still spreading in the country. What if you get infected, while you wait, he asks.

Dr. Panda says there is no change suggested in preventive measures and treatment of COVID-19 in light of the new variants. “All the mutants, whether it is circulating strains of the virus or the newer variants, the mode of spread is the same. Precautions like wearing masks,

avoiding crowded places, hand sanitation are still the effective methods to control the spread of the virus.”



As far as the treatment of COVID-19 is concerned, we do not feel any need to change the current standard treatment methods in wake of the new variants of Coronavirus, he adds.



Watch the full interview at this link: [https://www.indiascience.in/videos/corona-ko-harana-hai-](https://www.indiascience.in/videos/corona-ko-harana-hai-vaccination-special-with-dr-samiran-panda-head-division-of-epidemiology-and-communicable-diseases-icmr)



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