



The milestone and beyond

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(Mains GS 2 : Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources)

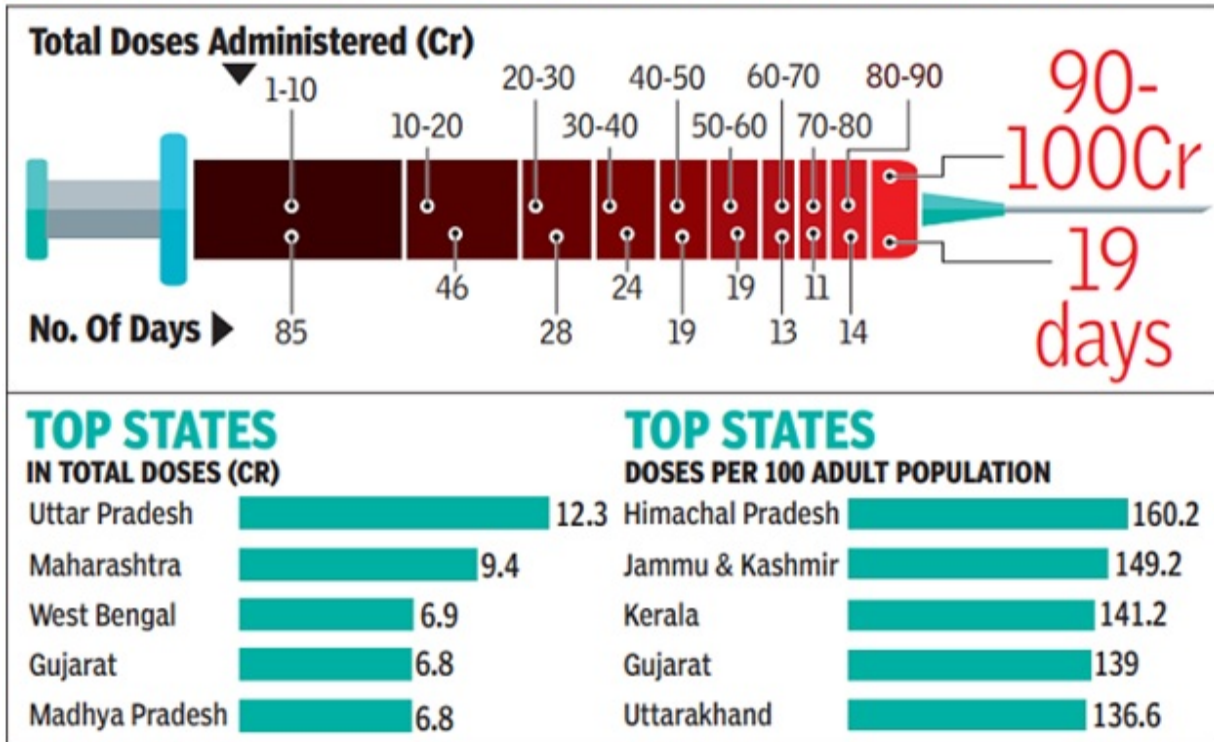
Context:

- The crossing of 100 crore **COVID-19 vaccine** doses milestone deserves a huge applause.
- Health care workers along with scientists, researchers, medical professionals, and vaccine manufacturers, have heroically overcome multiple obstacles in the quest to protect Indian citizens from COVID-19.

Triumph of science:

- After China, which has administered more than 200 crore doses, India is only the second country to have reached the landmark of 100 crore jabs.
- While the vaccination graphs of countries with significant populations like the US, Brazil and Indonesia have been largely flat, India's has been rising steeply.
- This milestone also marks the triumph of science and of India's research and manufacturing infrastructure built and nurtured over decades.
- The Patents Act, 1970 of India contributed hugely to the development of our drugs and pharmaceutical industry, which has enabled India to become a globally respected manufacturer of vaccines.

INDIA NOW A VACCINE BILLIONAIRE



Do not be complacent:

- The disastrous **second wave which was triggered** by unregulated large gatherings and complacency in vaccine procurement including lack of supply of oxygen created unprecedented chaos in the country.
- **The sudden announcement of the lockdown** led to lakhs of **migrant workers abandoned** and many of them perished along the way.
- The heart-rending images of people gasping for breath and of families desperately trying to obtain oxygen and hospital beds must be remembered for conscious preparedness.

Growing inequality:

- The economic shock due to the pandemic has been much more severe for the country for two reasons.
- First, pre-COVID-19, the economy was already slowing down, compounding existing problems of unemployment, low incomes, rural distress, malnutrition, and widespread inequality.
- Second, India's large informal sector is particularly vulnerable. Inequalities were increasing earlier also but the pandemic has widened them further. For example, the share of wages declined as compared to that of profits.
- Thus, reduction in inequalities is important for its own sake and for improving demand which can raise private investment, consumption and exports for higher and sustainable economic growth.

Be cautious:

- Country applaud science but our vaccination drive should be rolled out faster through respected scientific breakthroughs in other countries and placed adequate orders for their vaccines.
- The intensity of the second wave was compounded by procurement policy where cash-strapped States competed with each other over vaccine supply.
- The Prime Minister's birthday saw a record two crore inoculations demonstrating that India has the capacity to vaccinate at a faster rate.

The gaps in vaccination

- In the nine months since the vaccination started, India has only been able to fully vaccinate less than a third of our adult population.
- Countries with comparable **COVID-19** figures and even those with smaller or poorer economies have performed much better.
- Not only that, the gap between the proportion of the population that has got at least one dose and two doses is widest in India.
- Thus the Government should explore diverse methods, including compulsory licensing, to raise our domestic production of vaccines.
- Moreover, the Government also needs to roll out a plan to inoculate our children urgently so they can go back to school.

Provide a quasi-universal basic income:

- Providing a quasi-universal basic income and other safety nets to people is of utmost importance as **COVID-19** hits people very hard specially in economic terms.
- Renowned economist C. Rangarajan suggested three proposals on minimum income for the poor and the vulnerable in the post-pandemic period.
- These are: cash transfers to all women above the age of 20 years; expanding the number of days provided under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and a national employment guarantee scheme for urban areas.
- In all these proposals, there is no problem of identification; thus, a combination of cash transfers and an expanded guarantee scheme would provide income support to the needy.

India's universal free vaccination policy:

- A significant section of the population was forced to pay for vaccines as government centres ran out of them.

- In India not even 10% of the population can afford to pay for vaccines, yet the Government continues to allocate 25% of vaccines to the private sector. This will result in less vaccination.
- Thus the Government should realise that vaccinating all Indians as quickly as possible is linked to not only the health of our citizens but also the wealth of our nation.

Conclusion:

- The floundering economy can be turned around if we can drive away the dark clouds of COVID-19.
- That requires stakeholders to ramp up the pace of the roll out of vaccines to all, completely free, including to our children.

Covid19