



COVID-19 NEWS UPDATES

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CONTRIBUTION OF EXPANDED PROGRAM ON IMMUNIZATION TO FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

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MESSAGE FROM DIGNITARIES SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO PRIME MINISTER ON HEALTH

I am glad to see the special edition of COVID-19. I highly appreciate the diligent efforts of Federal EPI staff in initiating and accomplishing several activities to better combat with the COVID-19.

Federal EPI is the main custodian of storing and distributing the COVID-19 vaccine to the provinces and areas. Ministry of National Health Services

Regulation and Coordination appreciates the hard work of EPI employees across Pakistan and applaud their commitment and dedication for going extra mile to fight the pandemic. We salute the efforts of our front-line workers.

The information given in this special edition will provide an overview of actions Federal EPI is undertaking to receive, store and distribute vaccine at optimal temperature so they reach every nook and corner of Pakistan. I am sure that EPI would continue to work hard to get the job done.



DR. FAISAL SULTAN

NATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER, FEDERAL EPI

Federal EPI proudly presents this special edition on COVID-19. The department is playing a significant role in the vaccine supply chain management, for the last one year the department is mobilizing the resources to cater to the need of the population related to COVID-19 vaccine. We are leaving no stone unturned to vaccinate eligible people of Pakistan and to get rid of this contagious disease. This special edition captures all the interventions that EPI has taken to counter the adverse impact of COVID-19.



DR. MUHAMMAD AKRAM SHAH

Pakistan’s response to pandemic has received deserving praise from across the globe. Such kind of response would not have been possible under the keen leadership of NCOC Chairman, SAPM to Prime Minister on health, Secretary M/o NHR&C, and the DG Health. Moreover, National Program Manager’s far-sighted vision and tremendous management skills ensured Federal EPI contribution to effectively respond to ensure that potent vaccines reach to every nook and corner of Pakistan. Nevertheless, the pandemic of COVID-19 has been a wake-up call for policy makers around the globe. In Pakistan, although the response is commendable with meager resources, there is a dire need to invest more in the health infrastructure. With adequate and sustained investment in health, Pakistan would be able to develop a rigorous health system aiming for better health outcomes for all.

RESUMPTION OF EPI SERVICES

The pandemic of COVID-19 has tested the health delivery systems around the globe and Pakistan is no exception. Federal EPI also bear the brunt of the pandemic and immediately after the lockdown, immunization services were halted across the country. In these testing times, Federal EPI along with its provincial counterparts and partners, played its vital role to not only resume but also improve the immunization services and coverage by resuming the Enhanced Outreach Activities (EOAs) across the country. EOAs were successfully implemented by diverting a significant amount of EPI resources to improve the routine vaccine across the country, including far flung remote areas to reach every community– to reach every child.

PROVISION OF PPEs THROUGH NISP

Federal EPI mobilized its resources equivalent to \$ 8.5 million to procure Protective Personal Equipment – PPEs (masks, sanitizers and gloves). The PPEs were timely procured to ensure safety for clients as well as staff. Such measures were taken to ensure strict adherence to COVID-19 SOPs compliance.

COORDINATION

Under the guidance of the NCOC, M/o NHR&C, Expert Committee, and the National Programme Manager, Federal EPI developed the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP) for COVID-19 vaccination in Pakistan. DNPM and the Donor Coordination Officer, played a critical role to provide technical assistance in the development of the NDVP. Federal EPI ensured that all aspects were covered in the NDVP from planning and coordination to regulatory framework, from service delivery to quality assurance, from costing and budgeting to monitoring and supportive supervision, from surveillance to supply chain management and logistics, from training to risk communication, advocacy and social mobilization. To support the planning, WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank developed a readiness assessment tool – Vaccine Introduction Readiness Assessment Tool (VIRAT) / Vaccine Readiness Assessment Framework (VRAF). Federal EPI team contributed significantly in ensuring all indicators reflect the reality. As per the Prime Minister’s vision, Pakistan aims to vaccinate all of its eligible population against the deadly disease of COVID-19. In this regard, Federal EPI coordinated with the M/o NHR&C and NCOC to set realistic and achievable targets for 2021. Out of the total population of 234 million, Pakistan aims to vaccinate 70% of the eligible population (83 million) in 2021.



ARRIVAL CEREMONY OF SINOPHARM VACCINE AT NOOR KHAN BASE

ENGAGEMENT OF COVAX

Under the guidance of the competent authorities, Federal EPI has been coordinating with the COVAX Facility. COVAX, the vaccines pillar, co-led by WHO, CEPI, Gavi and UNICEF, is the only global initiative that is working to ensure COVID-19 vaccines availability to developing countries, including Pakistan. In its attempt to jointly deliver the COVID-19 vaccines free of cost to approximately 20% population in Pakistan, on behalf of NCOC and M/o NHR&C, Federal EPI went through a rigorous process to successfully submit the application to the COVAX Facility. The National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) and National Inter-agency Coordination Committee (NICC) were organized by Federal EPI for the approval of the application. Under the guidance of the Director General Health, Pakistan's application to the COVAX Facility was developed and submitted to Gavi. Deputy NPM, DD Operations, Technical Officer, Donor Coordination Officer, and the Finance and Compliance Officer, played a key role in the whole process.

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LAUNCHING CEREMONY ON THE ARRIVAL OF COVAX VACCINE

EXPANSION OF COLD CHAIN

In addition to vaccines, Federal EPI effectively and efficiently submitted an application to acquire Cold Chain Equipment from the facility. Deputy Director (Operations) and Assistant Director (Operations) are prominent Federal EPI Officers to develop and submit the proposal along with a team from Unicef. Federal EPI commendable role and contribution in realization of the easy access and free of cost COVID-19 vaccines through the facility was acknowledged tremendously by the development partners, when more than 1.2 million and 100,620 doses of AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines respectively arrived in Pakistan in May 2021.



EXPANSION OF COLD CHAIN

EFFECTIVE DATABASE MANAGEMENT

Effective database management is considered an important part of deployment and vaccination of COVID-19 vaccines. NCOC and Federal EPI coordinated with NADRA in order to develop the National Immunization Management System (NIMS). NADRA developed this national database to ensure record keeping of vaccinated population and un-vaccinated population for better planning, implementation and targeting. Furthermore, under the leadership of the M/o NHR&C, Federal EPI engaged a third-party to develop an effective system to manage the inventory of COVID-19 vaccines. The system is called COVID-19 Inventory Management System (COVIM). The main objective of this application is to effectively manage the vaccine schedule and its administration. In this regard, Deputy Director (M&E) and M&E Officer, played their instrumental role to ensure timely coordination among all stakeholders. Assistant Director, Surveillance is regularly reviewing data of call center pertaining to CVCs/MVCs issues to undertake and communicate to all stakeholders to strengthen the vaccination services. In addition, reporting compliance on COVIM is also monitored to ensure that COVID-19 vaccine stock availability and utilization is available in real time.



GROUP PHOTO AT THE LAUNCH OF COVAX

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THE TECHNICAL TEAM OF EPI IS WORKING ON COVID-19 INVENTORY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO MANAGE THE INVENTORY OF COVID-19 VACCINE-COVID-19 INVENTORY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (COVIM)

The innovative system was developed to manage the inventory of COVID-19 vaccine as per the direction and support of NCOC, explained by Mr. Asim Zaki, IT Expert, associated with Federal EPI. The COVID-19 Inventory Management System (COVIM) was developed by the third party but the whole process was initiated by the Federal EPI. During the development process, technical input was provided by the experts of Federal EPI related to the different features of the system. The innovative system is really helpful to keep and retrieve the information related to vaccine. We are updating the system on regular basis and entering all the information and numbers related to received, distributed and administered vaccine. The system is very dynamic as it keep the information of vaccine at all levels. The information keeps the record of vaccine arrival on airport and then its distribution to provinces and health facility level. Most of the time we work 24/7 to keep the system updated related to received, distributed and administered vaccine. Sometime it's challenging but our spirits are high because our mission is to vaccinate Pakistan, said Mr. Asim Zaki. In the beginning, we have trained 350 master trainer to better transmit skills to all data entry operators. The team across Pakistan is working very diligently and updating the information on system regular basis.

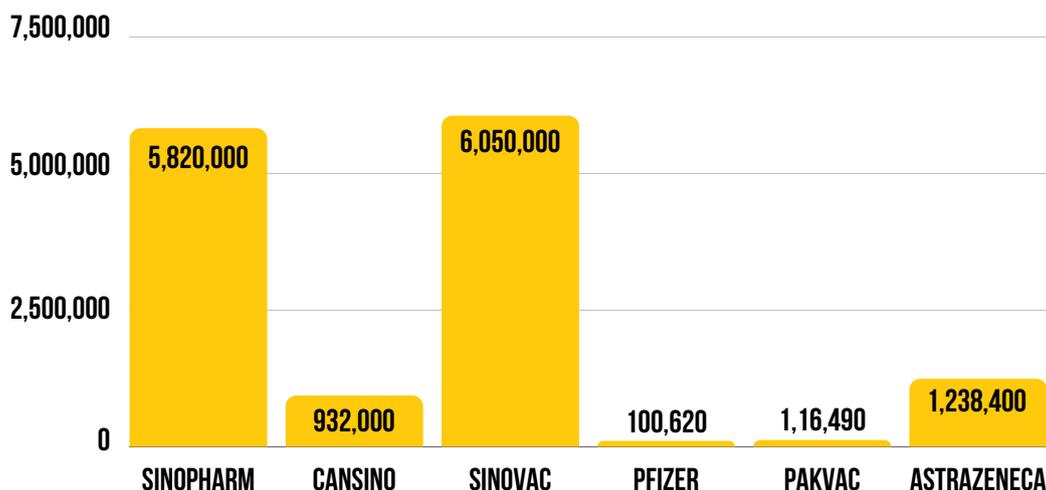


ARRIVAL CEREMONY OF COVAX VACCINE

IMMUNIZATION OF SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Federal EPI has been playing a pivotal role in managing the supply chain of COVID-19 vaccine in the country. As of June 10, 2021, the country has received more than 16 million doses of COVID-19 that included Sinopharm, Sinovac, CansinoBio, Pfizer and AstraZeneca. The received doses are stored at recommended temperature and conditions and distributed to the provinces and federating areas through Federal EPI. Earlier to arrival of vaccine, a strong coordination mechanism was developed among the NCOC, M/o NHR&C and Federal EPI to better advocate for the vaccine requirement of the country. Among others, Deputy Director Procurement and AD Operations played their instrumental role to ensure receiving and distributing COVID-19 vaccines. Their efforts are well acknowledged and recognized as they worked relentlessly irrespective of day, night, weekday, or weekend.

PAKISTAN HAS RECEIVED 16 MILLION DOSES OF COVID-19 VACCINE. CHINA WAS THE FIRST COUNTRY WHO HAS DONATED 500,000 DOSES INITIALLY TO THE COUNTRY TO COMBAT WITH PANDEMIC



OUR FOOT SOLDIERS ARE WORKING DAY AND NIGHT FOR DISBURSING THE COVID-19 VACCINE TO PROVINCES FOR SMOOTH ADMINISTRATION.

DR. MUHAMMAD AKRAM SHAH
NATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER, FEDERAL EPI

UCC INSTALLATION IN 15 DISTRICTS AND NATIONAL WAREHOUSE

With the support of the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF, Federal EPI installed 21 Ultra Cold Chain (UCC) Equipment in top 15 districts of Pakistan (disease burden wise). Such kind of equipment is helping in storage and handling of specific vaccines requiring ultra-cold temperatures, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Sputnik vaccines. Moreover, under the guidance of the M/o NHR&C, Technical Wing of the Federal EPI organized training of master trainings to share technical knowledge and awareness regarding vaccine administration, handling, storage, waste management, etc.

AEFI SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance has always been an important part of immunization services in Pakistan. Considering Federal EPI experience of ensuring timely and effective surveillance of VPDs, M/o NHR&C and NCOC directed Federal EPI and provincial health departments to manage surveillance activities. In this regard, AD Surveillance and COVID-19 Surveillance Consultant played a considerable role in developing draft Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) guidelines and training for COVID-19 surveillance.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AEFI COMMITTEE

As the preparations for the National COVID-19 Vaccination Drive gained pace across the country, the need for a well-functioning system for surveillance of AEFIs and ensuring vaccine safety was highlighted like never before. EPI being the national immunization programme having already a well-defined and active AEFI surveillance system across the country, the same system was utilized with slight modifications to accommodate the eligible age cohorts which were formerly beyond the scope of EPI.



COVID-19 VACCINATION CENTER AT ISLAMABAD

National AEFI Review Committee which is an independent technical forum for guiding the country in terms of vaccine safety was requested for guidance along the process. The committee’s membership was revised to include additional members for making the committee optimally equipped for causality assessment in terms of adult vaccination. The committee reviews the AEFI situation fortnightly and makes recommendations where and as required. The committee is performing an effective role in preserving community trust by preventing incorrect impression of association arising from coincidental adverse events following immunization.



DG, HEALTH IS INAUGURATING COVID-19 CELL

ESTABLISHMENT OF COVID-19 MONITORING CELL

The ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 has a significant impact on Pakistan’s health delivery system including immunization services. The Monitoring Cell was inaugurated on May 8, 2021, by DG Health and WHO Representative in Pakistan. The World Health Organization has provided the support in establishing the monitoring cell. The M&E plan of the monitoring cell was finalized after a consultative process and submitted to the M/o NHR&C in May 2021. However, monitoring of COVID-19 vaccination centers through supportive supervision was initiated simultaneously after a national training followed by Federal EPI conducting supportive supervision visits.



NPM, EPI IS BRIEFING THE DELEGATES

SUPPORT IN ESTABLISHMENT OF MVC AT IHITC

The Federal Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) extended its full support for establishing the first Mass Vaccination Centre at Isolation Hospital and Infectious Treatment Center (IHITC) Islamabad on prevention and control of COVID 19. The Federal EPI supported IHITC in terms of Human Resource, IT Equipment, Vaccine Carriers and other essential supplies for the smooth functioning of the MVC. Furthermore, the virtual and onsite training and refresher sessions were also conducted for the MVC staff.



INAUGURATION OF COVID-19 MONITORING CELL

COVID-19 RESPONSE CENTER- 1166

Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline (1166) is a joint initiative of NEOC and EPI. It was initially perceived as a mechanism for grievance redressal and community awareness. However, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent emergency situation in the country, the scope of this national platform was expanded. The helpline played a noteworthy role in managing concerns of the citizens related to COVID-19 disease and management by connecting them with expert medical advice wherever required. It played an instrumental role in steering the national response to COVID-19 pandemic by providing a trustworthy and efficient system to address COVID-19 related queries. Role of the helpline was further reinforcing when the country started vaccination of eligible age cohorts against COVID-19.

PASSION AND DEDICATION CAN CONQUER ANYTHING- A STORY OF EPI CHAMPION

Working 24/7, while having food and small naps during short work breaks at airports, warehouse and in transportation trucks is a routine for us now” revealed Mr. Anza Zafar, Assistance Director Operations and a Cold Chain Engineer working in EPI. Mr. Zafar stated that it gets really exhausting at times but the following 2 factors gets us going rather add more value and energy to our spirits and quality of work.

1. We know that the top level management of Ministry and EPI are awake with us as well as virtually connected & available, even at 2:00 AM or 3:00 AM in the midnight. We get solution driven responses instantly, which really encourage us and foster the idea of team work.

2.It’s really fulfilling and rewarding when we see people from all walks of life being vaccinated at the COVID-19 Vaccination Counters, that post vaccination sense of health security is pretty evident on their faces and motivates us big time.

To educate readers, we requested Mr. Zafar to share how EPI Pakistan is successfully managing the complex undertaking of vaccine storage and delivering it to all corners of Pakistan by sharing insights to the complete value chain .“We need to first understand that an effective cold chain system allows health workers to deliver these life-saving vaccines. These vaccines must be continuously stored in a limited temperature range from the time they are manufactured until the moment of vaccination. This is because temperatures that are too high or too low can cause the vaccine to lose its potency (its ability to protect against disease). We get a vaccine arrival pre-alert 24 to 36 hours prior that in case of other RI Vaccines is 10 to 14 days prior. So we ought to respond really fast with proactive documentation process catering for (invoices, packing lists, airway bills etc). Then coordination with DRAP starts to meet legal requirements like getting NOC, import waiver etc. Next is logistics preparations by ensuring lining up of refrigerated trucks fleet with ultra-cold chain and ensuring availability of safety squad. Then we move to airport for receiving the consignment. What keep us going-our mission to vaccinate Pakistan.



MR. ANZA IS ENSURING COLD CHAIN QUALITY MANAGEMENT SOPS

STRIVING FOR THE BEST: A STORY OF COMMITMENT, DEDICATION AND SUCCESS TO ACHIEVE THE END RESULTS

I feel proud to serve my nation by working day and night for smooth management of supply and cold chain for the receipt, storage and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in EPI store, entry into COVIM and VLMIS software and then further delivery to provinces as per plan of NCOC said Mr. Jamshed Khan, Deputy Director Procurement/OPs, Federal EPI.

It’s our mission to provide vaccines to every citizen of this country. While expressing his views, his eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm and commitment to achieve the targets of Federal Government by vaccinating at least 70 % population of Pakistan by December 2021.

Mr. Jamshed Khan is a 45 year old mid-level professional. He has been working with the Government of Pakistan for the last 17 years in various capacities.

He is a self-motivated and dynamic professional and associated with many other departments in different capacities. He joined the Federal EPI on October 13, 2020 and played a very important role in the logistics of COVID-19 vaccine. Mr. Jamshed and his team are working hard to accomplish the task assigned to them.

For the last 4 month the, team of eight (3 Officers, 2 Officials and 3 drivers) are on their toes for the transportation, storage, custom clearance and further distribution of COVID-19 vaccine to Provinces. The vaccine arrival time is mostly at midnight and all team members remain awake the whole night. Mr. Jamshed said, sometimes we receive vaccine consignment at 2:00 AM (midnight) and then we get free at 6:00 AM (morning) by dispatching the vaccine for the province and also report back to the office at 9:00 AM.

There are no working hours as sometimes we are working 72 hours in a stretch, answering to a question on how challenging it is during the pandemic time, he added there is a lot of impact on family life as it is highly disturbing but my wife and kids fully understand as we are in a state of war –fighting against pandemic day and night, so they are very supportive. Mr. Jamshed was associated with many other departments but had to cut-off from other work commitments due to workload related to supply chain logistics of COVID-19. He mentioned that my sacrifice and dedication will never end into smoke.



MR. JAMSHED AND HIS TEAM IS RECEIVING THE VACCINE CONSIGNMENT AT AIRPORT



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