



Vaccine Hesitancy

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This article is based on **“An unwanted booster dose for vaccine hesitancy”** that was published in The Hindu on 07/11/2019. It talks about the issue of Vaccine Hesitancy.

Recently, **the World Health Organization (WHO)** in a report held that Vaccine hesitancy is among the **top 10 threats to global health in 2019**.

WHO defines Vaccine hesitancy as a **delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccination services**. Vaccine hesitancy has been reported in more than 90% of countries in the world.

Instances of Vaccine Hesitancy

- Globally nearly 4,24,000 children have confirmed measles in 2019, as against a figure of 1,73,000 in the whole of 2018.
- In India, poor communities of Uttar Pradesh was reported to have taken **five times low uptake of oral polio vaccine** in the early 2000s.

Reasons for Vaccine Hesitancy

The main issue with Vaccine hesitancy is **misinformation**.

- **Religious propaganda** that the vaccine may contain microbes, chemicals and animal-derived products which is forbidden by religious laws.
- **Social media** is used in **stirring fear** in people by falsely blaming vaccines for unrelated diseases is the bedrock of the Vaccine hesitancy all across the globe.
For example, recently some sections in India are refraining from the polio vaccine. This is due to the misconception that the polio vaccine caused illness, infertility and was ineffective.

- **Vaccine-derived diseases: Oral Polio Vaccines (OPV)** contains weakened but live poliovirus. This virus from the vaccine is excreted by immunized children which can move from one person to another.

This allows the virus to stick around and mutate to a more virulent form, raising the threat of **vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV)**.

- **Inconvenience in accessing vaccines** is also the leading cause of Vaccine hesitancy.

Benefits of Vaccine

- According to WHO, vaccination **prevents between two-three million deaths each year**, a figure that will rise by **another 1.5 million if vaccine coverage improves**.
- Vaccination **protects children from serious illness** and complications of vaccine-preventable diseases which can include amputation of an arm or leg, paralysis of limbs, hearing loss, convulsions, brain damage, and death.

A study in 2017 that looked at flu seasons between 2010 and 2014 found that vaccination reduced flu-associated deaths by 65% among healthy children.

- The vaccine can also **prevent hospitalization** (thereby it can check out of pocket expenditure), reduce the severity of illness and prevent severe, life-threatening complications in children.

Way Forward

Practical tips for addressing Vaccine hesitancy in primary care include

- **Vaccination as the default approach:** Some countries have implemented specific sanctions for Vaccine hesitant families.
 - France has made vaccination with 11 vaccines mandatory for children—unvaccinated children cannot be enrolled at nurseries or schools.
 - In Australia, parents of children who are not vaccinated are denied the universal Family Allowance welfare payments.
- **Building trust:** Vaccine manufacturer can provide honest information about side effects and reassurance on a robust vaccine safety system.

They can also provide vaccination-related FAQ's, answering questions on benefits, safety, and immunologic aspects of vaccines and links to a number of online resources for physicians and parents.
- **Digital Algorithms:** Google, Facebook and other such platforms can be requested to make sure that users only get to see the credible, science-based information about the vaccines.
- The **influential person or celebrities** should come forward to dispel the myths leading to Vaccine hesitancy.

Vaccine hesitancy is threatening the historical achievements made in reducing the burden of infectious diseases, which have plagued humanity for centuries. A collaborative effort between paediatricians, family doctors, parents, public health officials, governments, the technology sector, and civil society will allow myths and misinformation around vaccination to be dispelled.

Drishti Mains Question

Explains the term Vaccine hesitancy. Also, analyse the reasons for Vaccine hesitancy in India.