

BANGLADESH

HEALTH WATCH

Dated: 16 June 2021

To

Prof. Dr. Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam

The Director General of Health Services

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Subject: Ensuring vaccination for the marginalized populations

Dear Sir,

We are thankful to you and your esteemed office for all the frantic efforts that you have been taking to protect the people of the country from the scourge of Covid-19. Bangladesh was the fastest vaccine offering country in this region of the world free of cost to every citizen. In order to support your noble endeavors, we bring to your kind notice the following.

Kindly find attached three news reports published in 'the Prothom Alo' and 'the Daily Star'. Bangladesh Health Watch, a civil society initiative, sponsored these investigative reporting, which were carried out in different parts of the country, including the Dhaka City. The inquiry was conducted among different categories of marginalized people who are at a higher risk of getting infected including the grave diggers, quarry workers, and city cleaners. The reports reveal the following discomfoting information.

Although the vaccination campaign in Bangladesh was enunciated in February 2021, some of those who were interviewed did not know about this campaign, although in some cases, jabbing was going on close by. For some, however, it was not an issue of information, but getting themselves registered, since many do not possess the national identification number (NID) or even a birth certificate. In addition, for many who actually own a smartphone, they do not know how to get themselves registered.

Since many of the menial job holders are not permanent staff of an organization, including city corporations and municipalities, their employers do not feel an urge to assist these workers to get vaccinated. Even in case of the permanent staff, the things are not any better. In some cases, a list was made apparently for vaccination, but to no avail.

In light of the above information, we take the privilege of suggesting, as below, some recommendations for your kind consideration.

1. For some categories of people as exemplified above, who are at higher risk, the provision of a prior registration system may be waived and they may be registered on the spot when they come to the vaccination centre (with or without NID);
2. In rural areas, field workers of the health and family planning departments, teachers and senior school/college students, local government body members may be urged to first brief and orient people at family level on the benefits and necessity of the vaccine and allay any fears, if found among the people, and bring prospective vaccine takers to the centres. The vaccine centres better be those which are used for EPI related vaccines because of familiarity of these spots;
3. If those who were informed and advised to take vaccine fail to come to the vaccine centres, should be called over phone to remind them, if necessary, repeatedly until they do take vaccine;
4. In urban areas the city corporations and the municipality authorities should be advised to send the list of their menial workers with names and phone numbers, so that they may be reached over phone to urge them to come to the vaccination centres, mentioning the locations of these vaccination centres. Phones should be repeated until the enlisted people take the vaccine, and finally,
5. We believe and suggest to you most humbly that the greatest emphasis may be put on encouraging and advising people to wear mask correctly and maintain physical distance of at least six feet from anyone and everyone who is not a family member living together, through every health facility and health staff in the country at least twice a day.

Please do let us know if you need further information or clarification.

With best regards,



Abu Muhammad Zakir Hussain, MD, PhD
Chair, Thematic Group on Vaccination
Bangladesh Health Watch



A. Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury, PhD
Convener
Bangladesh Health Watch

Copy for kind information to:

1. PS to Honourable Health Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka
2. PS to Secretary, Health Services Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka
3. Professor Dr. Meerjady Sabrina Flora, Additional Director General, DGHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka
4. Professor Dr. Tahmina Shirin, IEDCR Director, DGHS, Mohakhali Dhaka