



The Fear of Testing and COVID Vaccinations in Indian Villages

by Harsh Mahaseth — June 30, 2021 in Editorial, Education, Health, Health, India Reading Time: 3 mins read

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The pandemic has affected a huge population in India's huge poverty-stricken rural hinterland, while the country's recent viral outbreak eases in cities. Despite two-thirds of the cases reported in rural regions, only 15% of the persons in rural areas have got at least one vaccine dosage, compared to 30% in towns and cities. One citizen from Haryana told Gulf News that "a lot of people in my village don't want to take the vaccine. They fear that they will die if they take it." A villager climbed up a tree with his wife's documents in order to avoid the COVID vaccine.

Several rumors have been circulating on social media platforms. "People do not even step forward for testing as they think the government will declare them COVID-positive even if they are not," said Shoeb Ali, a doctor from a district in Uttar Pradesh. There have been sightings of several discarded bodies in rivers and hundreds of shallow graves in India, which indicate that Covid-19 is raging in India's heartland. Residents in Haryana have been hesitant to get the vaccine, and there have been reports of dozens of people reported with fever and deaths as well. "People who went to hospital never came back" was another quote from a villager.

"Even after opening up a vaccine center here, nobody is ready to take it," a villager told Gulf News. People have been reported jumping into rivers or escaping into forests to avoid mobile health teams in other States.

According to community health specialist Rajib Dasgupta, the Indian economy has also been hit hard by the illness, and villages are typically more concerned about making finances meet. "It's extremely difficult to communicate why vaccination is important until some of those distressed conditions are alleviated," he said.

Experts say India needs to implement the lessons learned from its polio immunization program for children under the age of five in the 2000s. After trusted community leaders were involved in spreading the message to parents that immunization was safe, the initiative was successful. Religious leaders in Uttar Pradesh were recently called in to persuade their members to be vaccinated for the disease using a similar strategy. According to Navneet Singh, who heads immunization efforts in Haryana's Jind district, face-to-face communication has helped ensure that over 70% of over-45s in Kalwa and neighboring villages have got at least one shot.

Sheela Devi, a Kalwa health worker, said her "heart was hammering" when she saw her name on the vaccination list, but she felt relieved when she saw the local doctor get the shot. She now works every day in the community, visiting door-to-door and attempting to persuade people to change their minds, with some success. She said that "gradually they were convinced that even if they get corona after getting vaccinated, they won't need hospitalization. They can take medicines and recover at home."

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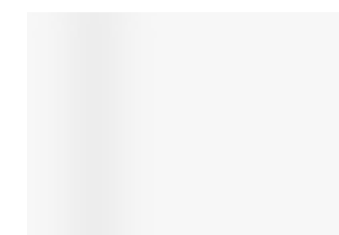
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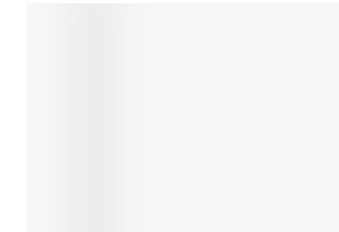
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