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Short communication

Covid 19 vaccination: Latest guidelines on blood donor deferral in India

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National Blood Transfusion Council (NBTC) is the apex policy formulating body for all the matters concerning the operations of blood centers in India. In a recent circular it announced the revised national guidelines for the blood donor deferral period after COVID 19 vaccination. NBTC has recommended in its initial circular a donor deferral period of 28 days after vaccination against COVID-19 irrespective of the type of vaccine received and may be reviewed as and when necessary on 5th March 2021 [1].

In January 2021, the central drugs standard control organization (CDSCO), India had granted the emergency-use authorization to two vaccines namely, Covishield (live vaccine, Oxford-AstraZeneca, United Kingdom being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, Pune) and Covaxin (inactivated vaccine, Bharat Biotech, India). The major difference between these two vaccines is that the Covishield is a live vaccine while Covaxin is an inactivated vaccine [2,3].

However, as per the current protocol in India, both Covishield and Covaxin have a 2-dose regimen, in which the doses are administered 4 weeks apart. Therefore, anyone undergoing vaccination against COVID-19 is essentially deferred for 28 days after the last dose, which means that he or she cannot donate for 56 days after taking the first jab [4].

In order to ramp up the coronavirus vaccination drive in the country, the Indian government on 19th April 2021, announced a "liberalised and accelerated" Phase 3 strategy of COVID-19 vaccination from May 1 to Everyone above the age of 18 [5].

As most blood donors are in the 18 - 44 age group, which will be eligible to get vaccinated from May 1st. To avoid being caught off guard, doctors are urging the public to donate blood before receiving the vaccine as the donation of blood is being affected significantly in addition to other existing factors like minimal public transport, reduced blood donation drives and fear of mass gatherings etc.

As the government has made the vaccination available for all above 18 years and no live attenuated vaccine is available in the country, an expert group, under the chairmanship of DGHS, Dr Sunil

Kumar, was constituted to review the advisory and on 5th May 2021, it has been decided to reduce the deferral period for blood donors to 14 days after receiving each/any dose of currently available COVID 19 vaccines in India subject to other norms for blood donation and would be reviewed regularly as per the need [6,7].

This latest amendment in reducing the donor deferral period from 28 to 14 days will help in preventing further worsening of the existing shortage in blood supply during pandemic.

Disclosure of interest

The author declares that he has no competing interest.

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