

COVID-19 VACCINE

Centre will bear cost of Phase 1: Modi

Says first phase is for frontline workers, asks politicians to opt out

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The first phase of the Covid-19 vaccination will incur no cost for the state governments, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday. While announcing that the Centre will bear the full cost, he also said politicians should not opt for the vaccine in Phase 1, which begins on January 16 and is meant to cover frontline workers, which include health workers (both private and government), security and armed forces staff, and sanitation workers.

Modi was interacting with chief ministers of all states to discuss the Covid-19 situation and the preparations for the vaccine roll-out in the country.

To begin with, 30 million frontline workers will be given both doses of the vaccine. Later inoculation will also involve those aged above 50 and those below 50 with co-morbidities, covering around 300 million people.

The Prime Minister said political leaders should do

nothing to undermine the efficacy of the vaccines — two already ready and four more in the pipeline — which had been certified by the scientific community. "We have been entirely guided by scientists as their expertise on this subject is the final word," Modi said in a warning to vaccine-sceptics.

Emphasising the need for credibility for the available vaccines, the Prime Minister said many forces — including corporate interests — would be at play to deride the Indian vaccines. This effort needs to be defeated conclusively, he said.

Hardly any chief minister raised any contentious issue during the meeting, though Maharashtra Health Minister Nwab Malik said in Mumbai he would prefer that the Prime Minister take the vaccine first to instill confidence in people.

Modi repeatedly highlighted the Indian element in the vaccine and praised the government for keeping the pandemic under check. "We have heard people saying: What is India doing? Is it sleeping? But we have worked with a sense of



purpose and the two approved made-in-India Covid-19 vaccines are more cost-effective than any other in the world and have been developed according to the country's specific needs," he said.

India, he added, would have been in dire straits had it needed to import all its vaccines. "I'm satisfied that we

worked together by standing united during the Covid crisis. Quick decisions were taken with full sensitivity. As a result, Covid has not spread in India at the scale at which it has spread anywhere else in the world," he said.

Modi outlined the vaccination process: The Co-WIN app will be used to keep track of

On priority

► To begin with, frontline workers — health workers, both private and government, security and armed forces staff, and sanitation workers — to be vaccinated

► Later inoculation to involve those aged above 50 and those below 50 with co-morbidities

► Modi: Political leaders should do nothing to undermine efficacy of the vaccines

the vaccination process. Real-time data on vaccinations is crucial, he told state governments, adding that a digitally generated vaccinated certificate will be provided to all. This will ensure data and will help alert people about the second dose. A final digital certificate will be issued to those who complete the process.

Monitoring the process and ensuring the second jab is taken is essential and the state governments will have to cooperate, he said, adding, "The world will follow what India does."

Modi did not specify whether all citizens of India will be inoculated but said around 300 million people will be vaccinated over the next few months. The health ministry has in the past said it might not be necessary to inoculate the entire population.

On the issue of states buying the vaccine, he said the pharma companies manufacturing it might face pricing problems if the state governments make their own purchases. "It is better that a single agency — like the central government — takes the responsibility. It will be better for the country," he added.

Home Minister Amit Shah will hold a meeting with states tomorrow at 12 pm on the vaccination drive.

Before the meeting, Chhattisgarh Health Minister TS Singh Deo and Jharkhand Health Minister Banna Gupta had raised questions about the efficacy data of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin. However, no such issue was raised at the meeting with Modi or later.

The Prime Minister, meanwhile, also flagged the bird flu emergency and is expected to call a smaller meeting with chief ministers of the affected states.