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Pediatricians and experts share concerns around availability, affordability of children vaccine

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The vaccine ZyCoV-D received Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) from the drug regulator on August 20 making it the first vaccine to be administered in the age-group of 12 to 18 besides adults.

Pediatricians and experts have shared their concerns around availability and affordability of children vaccine at a time when the Central government and Zydus Cadila are also negotiating over pricing of its DNA-based needle-free COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D.

Zydus Cadila is learnt to have proposed ₹1,900 for ZyCoV-D three-dose jab. Zydus Cadila's ZyCov-D- the world's first Plasmid DNA Vaccine for Covid-19 is the only vaccine today approved by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergency use in children aged 12 years and above.

Though efficacy of ZyCoV-D was 67% compared to mRNA vaccine and others which is about 90%, there have not been late stage trials which Zydus Cadila has promised to publish at a later date. The vaccine works by triggering the immune system to produce spike proteins similar to the virus, which triggers the antibody production against the virus. This is a painless vaccine introduced to the skin and subcutaneous tissue where there is maximum concentration of macrophages which ingest and take the DNA material into the cell nucleus.

Talking about the ZyCoV- D Covid vaccine, Dr Santosh Soans, Past President, Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) and Scientific Chair 2023, International Pediatric Association (IPA) explained, "The concerns are that the efficacy is only 67% so far and requires further trials and we don't know what is the long term consequence of the new technology like risk of altering gene. There is a chance of continued antibody production resulting in unknown inflammatory disorder."

Any new product that is launched into the market will have a higher cost due to the research involved. Zydus Cadila vaccine also requires a jet-applicator and needs three doses compared to other Covid vaccines but during the pandemic, we need to support the government's initiative for universal vaccine for every man, woman, and child and bring down the cost to less than 1500 which I feel is appropriate."

"Children under the age of 18 make up a significant portion of the population which is 472 million, who stayed indoors for more than a year, mainly unaffected by the virus and

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this, more than 100 children died of COVID-19 in Indonesia every week in July, challenging the widely held belief that children are at low risk from COVID-19," according to Ahmedabad based pharmaceutical consultant Dr Sanjay Agrawal.

Zydus Cadila COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D will be introduced in the nationwide anti-coronavirus vaccination drive shortly, according to official sources.

Centre is also awaiting recommendations of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) for introducing ZyCoV-D in the inoculation drive and prioritising beneficiaries focusing on those aged 12-18 years with co-morbidities.

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Clinical trials are ongoing for Covovax, a Covid-19 vaccine developed by American company Novavax Inc. for children below 18 years of age by the Serum Institute of India (SII). Clinical trials are also ongoing for Biological E protein subunit vaccine Corbevax, on children aged 5 to 18 years and above and it is expected to be rolled out by December this year, according to official sources.

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