

Vaccine for Teens Aged 15-18: Bharat Biotech Starts Re- Labelling, Exchanging of Unused Covaxin Stock



Bharat Biotech's Covaxin is the only available option for adolescents in the 15-18 age group, whereas senior citizens and frontline workers will start receiving the precautionary dose from January 10. (Photo: PTI File)

Bharat Biotech had announced in November the extension of Covaxin's shelf life to up to 12 months from earlier approval of nine months. There are 1-2 lakh stocks, which require re-labelling.

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As India launches vaccination drive for teenagers starting January 3, Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech has started re-labelling and exchanging the stock lying with the private hospitals, News18 has learnt.

The company, after receiving the approval from the country's apex drug regulator on the extension of expiry date from nine to 12 months, has started lifting the stock on its own expense for re-labelling or exchange.

The lobby of hospitals, Association of Healthcare Providers India (AHPI), representing 2,500 super specialty and 8,000 smaller hospitals across India, confirmed that Bharat Biotech has started lifting the unused stock.

"Out of the total stock of a little over 50,000 vaccines, around 70% of them – almost 35,000 – are approaching expiry in March," AHPI Director-General Girdhar J Gyani told News18. "The company has started picking up the stock from the hospitals for re-labelling," he added.

It had in November announced the extension of Covaxin's shelf life to up to 12 months from earlier approval of nine months.

"In total, there are not more than one to two lakh stocks across the country that require re-labelling," an industry source privy to the development told News18.

Bharat Biotech has been providing the pick-up facility of the vaccines and bearing all expenses in the process.

"The company has been picking the entire stock from the hospital, dropping it back with expenses on cold chain storage and distribution. Several crore of rupees have been spent as the company has been testing every vial again before re-labelling," the source said.

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Hospitals Book Fresh Orders Apart from Exchange

While batches from some hospitals will undergo re-labelling, the other hospitals will receive an entire new stock of Covaxin.

"We will be receiving adequate doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech to cater to the demand to fulfill adolescent vaccination as well as booster dose of any for the priority group under senior citizens," Karthik Rajagopal, chief operating officer, Manipal Hospitals told News18.

“The company has informed us that they have selected us as one of the hospitals, which will be getting all of the new stock. Hence, starting Monday, we are ready to start the drive (vaccination) for teenagers,” Rajagopal said.

Other hospitals receiving the fresh stock include Cloudnine Group, Rainbow Hospital, Shishuka Hospital, Springleaf Hospital, Care and Cure and Motherhood Hospitals among others.

Top hospitals including Fortis Healthcare, Medanta, Apollo Hospitals have already placed orders for the new stock apart from requests for re-labeling or exchange of old stocks.