

# Ensuring safe delivery of immunization services amidst Corona Virus Disease – 2019 pandemic

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Dear Editor,

The Corona Virus Disease — 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has accounted for a significant effect on the health system and the delivery of both essential and emergency services [1]. As of now, 3 175 207 cases and 224 172 deaths have been reported owing to the novel infection across 215 nations and territories around the world, with the global case fatality rate rising up to 7% [2]. One of the most essential services that has been significantly affected owing to the pandemic is immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases, and thus it is very essential to continue with the immunization services in all the feasible areas to prevent emergence of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases [1,3]. This is a very essential domain of the emergency public health response, as we cannot afford to deal with two different types of infectious disease outbreaks simultaneously [3].

While these immunization services are being carried out, it is extremely important to take targeted steps to safeguard the health of health care professionals and the members of the community who are visiting the immunization site [4]. Our aim should be to deliver immunization and at the same time not increase the probability of acquisition or transmission of the COVID-19 infection, and this will also require implementation of hygiene measures for immunization services and ensure that it is kept

separate from COVID-19-related services [1,3]. To ensure the safety of health professionals involved in immunization, it has been advocated to immunize them against seasonal influenza vaccine and other routine immunizations which they have not taken yet. This prevents the further spread of the vaccine-preventable diseases in the settings where they work [4].

In addition, we have to take adequate steps to improve the safety of the immunization sites, including conducting vaccination sessions in well-ventilated settings, periodic disinfection of the site, and allowing only one person to accompany the person who needs to be immunized to avoid overcrowding and reduce the possibility of disease transmission as it spreads by close contact [4]. On a similar note, the health authorities should aim to organize frequent immunization sessions and call people by appointment to avoid crowding at the vaccination site. Moreover, the public health authorities should also arrange for either hand sanitizer or hand washing facilities at the entrance so that people can wash/sanitize their hands before they enter the immunization site. This is also a very important

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public health action to minimize the spread of the infection and has to be made available compulsorily [4,5].

Furthermore, it is preferable to organize specific immunization sessions for high-risk groups of people (elderly people, pregnant females, those people having comorbid illness, etc.). This not only helps them to improve their immunity but also owing to the conduction of exclusive sessions, these vulnerable group of people are protected from acquiring the infection from other individuals [4]. However, it is very important that health professionals should also take adequate measures to protect themselves and also the patients while immunizing them [5]. These measures encompass adhering to hand hygiene practices regularly, avoiding touching eyes-nose-mouth, strictly complying with other infection prevention and control measures (respiratory hygiene, use of personal protective equipment, safe disposal of the same, etc.), and cleaning the phone properly and not using it while the patients are around [5]. Finally, if the health workers develop COVID-19 symptoms, they should isolate themselves and not go to work, instead seek advice from the physicians [4].

In conclusion, in the ongoing battle against COVID-19 infection, it is extremely important to continue with immunization services wherever possible. However, our aim should be to improve the immunity of beneficiaries and not to expose them to the additional risk of COVID-19, and thus specific steps should be taken to mitigate the risk of

acquisition of infection and safeguard the well-being of health care professionals.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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