

STATES TOLD TO PREVENT RUMOURS ON VACCINES

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A vial of Covishield.

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has written to all the States and the Union Territories to check the spread of misinformation on the two COVID-19 vaccines, and advised them to take penal action against those disseminating wrong and ill-informed news.

In a communication dated January 19 to the Chief Secretaries of all the States and the Union Territories, Mr. Bhalla also “strongly emphasised that the National Regulatory Authority in the country has found that the two vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin — were safe and immunogenic.”

The Centre, in close collaboration with the State governments and the Union Territory administrations, had launched the COVID-19 vaccination drive from January 16 across the country with the two vaccines, the communication said.

Mr. Bhalla said healthcare workers and frontline workers are being inoculated as per the priority decided by the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC), and subsequently the priority groups 2 and 3 will be vaccinated.

‘Creating doubts’

“I would like to strongly emphasise that the National Regulatory Authority in the country has found both the vaccines safe and immunogenic. However, it has been reported that unfounded and misleading rumours are circulating on social and other media, creating doubt about the safety and efficacy of these vaccines. Such rumour mongering, particularly by vested interests, can create unwarranted doubts among people,” the letter said.

“There is, therefore, a need to check all such kinds of unfounded scare-mongering relating to the safety and immunogenicity of the vaccines,” the letter said.

Urging the States and the UTs to put in place an appropriate mechanism to check the spread of such ill-informed rumours,

Mr. Bhalla asked the Chief Secretaries to direct all the authorities concerned under the State governments to take appropriate measures to counter the spread of all such kind of “false information” about COVID-19 vaccines as well as promptly disseminate factual messages.

“Penal action may be taken against the person/s or organisation/s who is/ are found to have indulged in such activities, under the relevant provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860,” the letter said.

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