

# A NECESSARY REVERSION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON GOING BACK TO FREE VACCINES POLICY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

The Centre has announced a much-needed [course correction in India's vaccination policy](#) with Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking the podium to announce that the month-old decision to leave States to procure vaccines on their own for their 18-44 population would be ending in two weeks. States were allowed to procure 25% of the vaccines manufactured and the Centre 50%, a policy that the [Supreme Court termed "irrational and arbitrary"](#). The Court's comments have had a salutary effect. From June 21, the Centre will be procuring 75% and States will no longer have to pay vaccine companies for the same. Vaccines will continue to be free for all those who choose to get their shot at government centres. The 25% vaccines that were allotted to private hospitals will continue too, though the service charges that they charge will be capped at 150. This ceiling price on vaccines in hospitals will bring predictability and be hugely beneficial to citizens. The Centre, which controlled all supply of vaccines and had negotiated prices and orders with Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute saw itself desperately short of supply right in the middle of India's deadly second wave. The hospital emergencies worsened the Centre's panic and so it chose a path that no country had undertaken, of [devolving the responsibility of buying vaccines to States](#). Health has traditionally been within the purview of States, and it stands to reason that they would invariably have to deal with the challenges that vaccination throws up. This includes vaccine hesitancy, the problem of transportation, the availability of trained personnel and the existing capacity at health-care sites. Faced with the intensity of the second wave, States demanded more vaccines and autonomy in deciding how to administer them. What resulted were frequent public spats, with the Centre blaming States for inefficiently using available stocks and yet demanding more.

Though there are substantial numbers of senior citizens yet to be vaccinated, particularly with a second dose, it is clear that the foreseeable demand will be in the sub-45 category. The Government appears more confident of getting a steady stream of supply from Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute and, in a bold move, has [ordered 30 crore doses of an untested vaccine](#) from the Hyderabad-based Biological E. Assuming that a third wave is not in the vicinity, these changes in total could be the beginning of a smoother, more efficient vaccine roll-out. Mr. Modi's announcement was preceded by a truculent defence of himself and his government and passing on blame to a variety of actors, including governments before 2014, for India's very real shortcomings on vaccination. However, the path to positive change is often meandering, and surviving the pandemic and being wiser from mistakes must be the spirit in which these policy changes are adopted.

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From the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, to the landmark Ayodhya verdict, 2019 proved to be an eventful year.

**END**