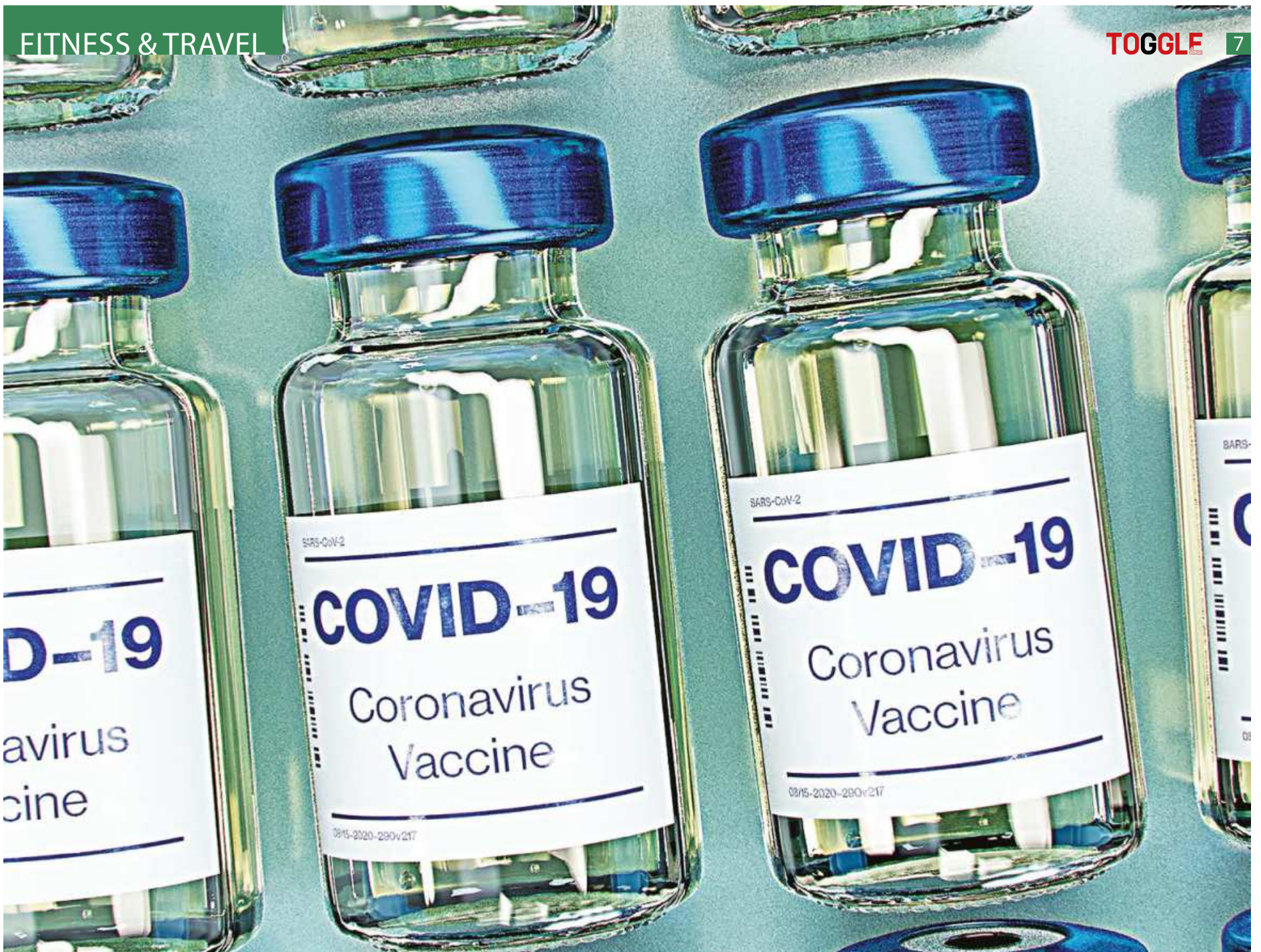




Covid-19 vaccine is around the corner, but here's a reality check

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After almost a year of fear, mayhem and uncertainty, a silver lining is finally here. If everything goes well, the first batch of three crore Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine is all set to arrive in Bangladesh in early January, according to the Health Minister. But before we brace for a new hope of swift recovery from the pandemic, here's everything we need to consider:

The vaccine will be given to selected groups first

At the time of writing this article, the total number of infected people in the country stands at 489,178 with a death toll of 7,020. As unfortunate as it may be, it is quite clear that the first doses of vaccine will not reach every individual in the very beginning. In fact, the three crore doses will reach around 1.5 crore people or 9% of our total population. This is because the vaccine will need two shots for each individual where the second shot must be taken after 28 days of taking the first one.

Bangladesh is procuring the vaccine through India's Serum Institute. After the first three crore doses, Serum Institute will supply 50 lacs of doses per month in the next six months. However, the government is preparing a draft list of selected groups of people who will

receive the vaccine from the first batch, including 1.2 crore of people aged 60 and above, nearly 11 lacs private and government frontline doctors and health workers, 5.5 lacs police personnel, nearly 2 lacs freedom fighters, 3 lacs army personnel, 50,000 journalists and 75,000 government officials including public representatives, ministry officials and so on.

The government is also considering importing Russia's Sputnik and China's Sinopharm vaccines to meet the vaccine demand.

Why are we not considering Pfizer vaccine?

The Pfizer vaccine was recently approved in the UK and the USA after it showed proved to be 95% effective against the virus. In the UK, Margaret Keenan, a 90-year-old resident, was the first to receive the vaccine outside trials and so

far, the vaccine bears good hope.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh does not have a cold chain capable of storing the vaccine at a minus 60 to 70 degree centigrade. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, however, can be stored in 2 to 8 degree centigrade, making it the most efficient choice for us.

However, the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, although all set to be imported, must be approved first by the Indian authorities, WHO and the DGDA, before Serum Institute can export them to Bangladesh.

CEO of Serum is hopeful that the due authorisations will be in by the month's end and here's to hoping that everything goes well.

So, here's the reality check: although the vaccine is around the corner, it may very well be early 2022 by the time things go back to pre-Covid level. Brace up.