

GLOBAL UPDATE

15,989
New cases in 24hrs

12,80,317
Total cases

21,162
Deaths

11,08,747
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,245,815
Deaths

199,376,990
Total cases

Covid-19 vaccines do their job

Finds IEDCR, BSMMU studies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The vaccines for Covid-19 give protection against infection of the deadly coronavirus and anyone who is jabbed face less severity in case of breakthrough infection, found two different studies by local organisations.

The findings of the studies by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), which were released yesterday, were in line with those of various international journals.

The IEDCR, which went through data from 1,334 Covid-19 patients from May and June aged above 30, found that vaccinated people face lower risks of respiratory problems, hospitalisation and fatality in case of breakthrough infection.

A breakthrough infection is a case of illness in which a vaccinated individual becomes sick from the same illness that the vaccine is meant to prevent.

The BSMMU study found antibodies in 98 percent of the people who received a full dose (two shots spaced eight weeks) of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

The findings of the two studies have lent added weight to the government's special vaccination campaign from August 7 for rural and elderly people in the backdrop of an alarming rise in Covid-19 caseload.

With the campaign, the government is hoping to reduce the infection rate and mortality rate in the country, which stands at 12,80,317 and 21,000 respectively as of 8 am yesterday.

The IEDCR study found that 11 percent of unvaccinated Covid-19 patients suffered from breathing difficulties whereas the rate was four percent among those vaccinated.

Of the sample size of 1,334 individuals, 592 were unvaccinated and 306 received two doses of the vaccine.

The hospital admission rate was 23 percent among the unvaccinated and 7 percent among the vaccinated.

Among the unvaccinated Covid-19 patients, 19 required intensive care unit support while only three among

the vaccinated needed assistance from the special department of the hospital, according to the study.

Among those unvaccinated who had comorbidities, the hospital admission rate was higher: 32 percent. Despite comorbidities, the hospital admission rate was only 10 percent among those vaccinated.

Only one of the vaccinated patients died, while the number was 17 for the unvaccinated patients.

In this context, the IEDCR urged people to maintain the health and safety rules and take vaccines, which will vastly reduce health risks.

Meanwhile, the BSMMU study found antibodies in 98 percent of the people who got a double dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India called Covishield.

A total of 209 Covid-19 vaccine recipients volunteered for the study titled "Hematological Parameters and Antibody Titre After Vaccination Against SARS-CoV-2", which was led by Sharfuddin Ahmed, vice-chancellor of the BSMMU.

The samples -- more than half of which came from healthcare professionals -- were collected between April and July this year.

In most vaccine recipients, the number of antibodies ranged between 300 and 1,000 Au/millilitre of blood.

As many 31 percent of the participants had Covid-19 before vaccination; they had higher levels of antibodies.

Those who have not developed antibodies had underlying health conditions like cancer, Md Salahuddin Shah, co-investigator of the study, told The Daily Star.

"Although the sample size is small, this study suggests that Covid-19 vaccines are efficacious. Our study will partly help policymakers decide on booster doses," said Shah, also the chairman of the haematology department at the BSMMU.

A total of 42 percent of the participants reported side effects after vaccination. The symptoms were mild in all cases.

The study found no relation between the side effects and the number of antibodies after vaccination.



On oxygen support, Sirajul Alam, a 65-year-old Covid-19 patient, being wheeled into the Covid-19 unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital by his son around noon yesterday. Sirajul was among the few lucky ones who managed to get admission into the overcrowded unit.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PM to be in UNGA in person

FROM PAGE 1
bilateral or multilateral events that the PM joined were virtual.

The 76th session of the UNGA, the largest diplomatic event, will be held on a limited scale because of the pandemic, the foreign minister said.

Although the Covid-19 situation in New York is now much better than it was last year, the spread of the Delta variant has caused concern.

However, preparations for the PM's visit are underway, officials said.

The 75th session of the UNGA was held virtually last year -- a rare occurrence in UN's history. Heads of governments and states from various corners of the world had sent their recorded speeches to the event last year.

During his visit to Dhaka in May this year, UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkır had announced an in-person assembly this year.

Momen said the UNGA this year will be held on a limited scale, with the number of heads of states and governments in attendance yet to be determined.

There will be no side events, but two high-level meetings will be held -- one on nuclear and the other on the global situation -- during 21-26 September.

All health rules will be maintained during the UNGA session, Momen said.

Apart from the formal events at the UNGA, various bilateral meetings are usually held on the sidelines, but that will not be the case this year.

There will also not be any in-person meetings with local members of the Bangladesh community, Momen said. **MOU ON CO-PRODUCTION OF SINOVAC SOON**

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) will be signed between Bangladesh's health ministry, Incepta Pharmaceuticals and Chinese company Sinopharm for co-production of the vaccine, the minister said.

"We have sent the draft MoU to the health ministry... under the deal, Incepta will get the vaccine in bulk and will then do bottling, labelling and finishing," Momen said.

"It should be done soon because even after starting the work, it will take two months for the pharmaceutical company [to supply to the market]. If delayed, time will be wasted," Momen said.

Presently, Bangladesh is importing Sinopharm vaccine from China under a commercial deal. So far, 70 lakh Sinopharm vaccines of the contracted 1.5 crore have arrived.

China said Bangladesh needed to order in advance if more vaccines are to be imported because there is high demand for Sinopharm vaccines globally. China also said they will ensure smooth supply of the vaccine.

Asked about importing Sputnik vaccine from Russia, Momen said Covid infections in Russia have risen severely and therefore officials are not going to the office. Thus, signing of the MoU on Sputnik import is being delayed.

Bangladesh government had sent a proposal to Russia to purchase 10 million Sputnik V vaccines around a month ago, but Russia is yet to reply.

Iran warns against any action over tanker attack

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday vowed to respond to any "adventurism", its foreign ministry said, after the US and Britain joined Israel in blaming it for a deadly tanker attack, claims Tehran denies.

The MT Mercer Street, managed by prominent Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer, was attacked on Thursday off Oman.

A British security guard and a Romanian crew member were killed in what the United States, Britain and the vessel's operator Zodiac Maritime said appeared to be a drone strike.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday Iran should face consequences.

Analysts said the attack bore all the hallmarks of tit-for-tat exchanges in

the "shadow war" between Israel and Iran, in which vessels linked to each nation have been targeted in waters around the Gulf.

Iran blamed Iran for the attack, accusations rejected by Tehran, with Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh saying Sunday that Israel "must stop such baseless accusations".

The US and Britain on Sunday also then blamed Iran for the attack, with Washington vowing an "appropriate response".

Iran "will not hesitate to protect its security and national interests, and will immediately and decisively respond to any possible adventurism," ministry spokesman Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

Delta on the rampage

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Rajshahi, Natore, Kushtia, Jashore, Khulna and Satkhira.

These districts had seen Covid positivity rate of over 30 percent on average in the entire fourth week of that month.

To curb the transmission of the variant in those districts and prevent its spread to other parts of the country, the Epidemiology and Public Health Committee of the health directorate on May 29 recommended immediate imposition of "strict lockdown" in those districts.

The government, however, delayed deciding on it, and the positivity rate rose to 45 percent on average in the eight districts by the end of June.

Not only that, the overall Covid positivity rate across the country rose to around 25 percent on June 30 from 9 percent on May 30.

Having no other options, the government then imposed countrywide lockdown from July 1. It, however, relaxed the restrictions for eight days from July 15 for the Eid-ul-Azha.

Yesterday, 29 districts saw Covid positivity rate above 40 percent, while it was between 30 percent and 39 percent in 24 districts, shows data of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On July 7, daily Covid deaths crossed the 200-mark for the first time. Since then, the country has been logging 213 deaths a day on average.

With the number of Covid patients rising every day, hospitals all over the country have been stretched to their limits.

Yesterday, the occupancy rate of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds at Covid-dedicated hospitals was 87 percent while that of High Dependency Unit beds was 89 percent across the country.

Experts fear that both deaths and infections may keep rising because of a lack of effective measures to curb the virus transmission.

"The Covid situation worsened further in the past one month. We fear the daily death toll may cross the 300-mark soon," said Dr Arifa Akram, assistant professor of virology at the National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Centre (NILMRC).

"In the last one month, almost all the Covid samples sequenced at different laboratories were found to be of Delta variant," Arifa told this newspaper yesterday.

"If we are to break the transmission chain, we have to either strictly maintain the health safety guidelines or vaccinate a good number of people. Otherwise, virus infections will continue to rise."

She also said the latest rush of garment workers to the capital due to reopening of factories amid lockdown will lead to further rise in virus infections.

Vaccinate the mothers-to-be, new moms

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The recommendation came after the court ordered Attorney General AM Amin Uddin to communicate with the authorities concerned of the government to finalise its decision and make an announcement.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim passed the order verbally during a hearing on a writ petition that sought the HC's directive to provide Covid-19 vaccine to expecting mothers on a priority basis.

During the hearing, the HC bench said the authorities concerned of the government, including the National Technical Advisory Committee and the NITAG are reportedly thinking and working on the issue. Enayetur Rahim read out some portions of a report published on The Daily Star on August 1 -- "Covid-19 Vaccine: A costly

dilemma over pregnant women?"

The petition said receiving the vaccine was a constitutional right of expecting mothers, but the issue was not included in the government's Surokkha App, the vaccine registration App.

The lawyers stated that around 35 lakh women of the country become pregnant per year which means that 35 lakh women carry existences of at least 35 lakh people more every year, but thousands of expecting mothers and children are dying due to Covid-19 infection.

"The deaths of expecting mothers and their children can be reduced if they are vaccinated on a priority basis."

The petitioners prayed to the HC to pass directives to the health secretary, principal secretary at the

Prime Minister's Office, cabinet secretary, directorate general of The Directorate General of Health Services and director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research to take necessary measures to this effect.

Earlier, Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, DG of the DGHS, told the journalists they will decide if the expert committee recommend for vaccinating expecting and lactating mothers.

On May 31 last year, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim, following a writ petition, directed the authorities concerned to conduct necessary tests, including that of Covid-19, and provide treatments to expecting women on a priority basis at all government and private hospitals across the country.

Hard to get amid Covid wave

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and some other major facilities with dengue, said they did not get treatment there.

Some said they had to get admitted to private hospitals.

Sanowar Hossain, 35, a resident of Mayakanon, said he went to Mugda hospital on July 26, but was advised to go to the DMCH, which also refused to admit him.

"I'm now trying to get admitted to a private facility," said Sanwar.

DGHS data shows only 632 confirmed dengue patients had been admitted to public hospitals while 2,448 took treatment in private ones.

"The number of patients has been increasing in our hospital for the last few days as other big hospitals are not providing dengue treatment which is putting us under tremendous pressure," said Kazal Rekha, in-charge of nurses at medicine units 2 and 4 at Mitford.

If the number of patients increases further, two patients will be treated in a single bed, he said.

Mohammad Ali Habib, deputy director of Mitford, said the hospital has prepared a separate unit for dengue patients which will begin treating patients in a couple of days.

"A total of 144 patients are taking treatment at the hospital. Of them, 59 took admission in the last 24 hours. Among them, 25 are children, 71 men and 48 women," he said.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of DGHS, said, "Treatment of dengue patients will start at Lalkuthi hospital in Mirpur and Railway hospital in Kamalapur in a week."

An official of the DGHS said five hospitals have been prepared for dengue treatment and, if necessary, other hospitals will also be prepared.

A decision has been made to set up a dedicated dengue corner in every

hospital where doctors can examine patients with dengue symptoms and take the steps necessary.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, said patients taking treatment at private hospitals was a matter of grave concern.

There is a national guideline for dengue treatment and the DGHS has trained doctors and nurses of government hospitals to abide by the guideline. But doctors and nurses of private hospitals are not trained and they do not follow the guideline, he said.

Besides, there is an organised dengue management system at the DMCH and Suhrawardy hospital. But these hospitals have mobilised their resources to treat Covid patients.

If prominent public hospitals kept some space for dengue treatment, the patients would have gotten better treatment, he said.

Poland steps up security at vaccination centres after attacks

AFP, WARSAW

Poland yesterday said it was stepping up security at vaccination points following two arson incidents overnight in a single town and an attempt by anti-vaccine activists to break into another.

"These incidents are recurring unfortunately," Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told reporters.

"They will all be severely punished in accordance with current regulations and we will also carry out activities aimed

at increasing the security of all these centres," he said.

Police chief Jaroslaw Szymczyk said arsonists had set fire to a mobile vaccination centre and an office used by the local epidemiological agency in the town of Zamosc in eastern Poland.

There were no casualties from the fires.

He called the incidents "extremely shocking" and said there would be "around the clock" security at vaccination points.

"Unfortunately we are observing

an escalation of extremely brutal and even thuggish behaviour in anti-vaccine circles," he said.

Last month, police were called to two incidents involving vaccine sceptics -- one at a vaccination point in Grodzisk Mazowiecki where activists scuffled with security guards and medics.

The government has been encouraging Poles to get vaccinated, but the rate of vaccinations has slowed down sharply and remains relatively low in southern and eastern regions of the country.

Nazi camp guard, 100, to stand trial in Germany

AFP, FRANKFURT

A 100-year-old former concentration camp guard will stand trial in Germany in October accused of complicity in 3,518 murders, public prosecutors announced yesterday.

The prosecutor's office in Neuruppin, which first brought the charges in February, received a medical assessment which confirmed the man is "fit to stand trial" despite his advanced age.

Hearings will be limited to two-and-a-half hours per day, according to prosecutors.

The suspect is accused of "knowingly and willingly" assisting in the murder of prisoners at the Sachsenhausen camp in Oranienburg, north of Berlin, between 1942 and 1945.

He is accused notably of complicity in the "execution by firing squad of Soviet prisoners of war in 1942" and the murder of prisoners "using the poisonous gas Zyklon B".

Thomas Walther, a lawyer representing a number of the victims in the case, told the German newspaper Welt am Sonntag: "Several of the co-complainants are just as old as the accused and expect justice to be done."

The Nazi SS detained more than 200,000 people at the concentration camp during its lifetime, of which 20,000 are thought to have been killed.

Germany has been hunting down former Nazi staff since the 2011 conviction of John Demjanjuk, on the basis the guard served as part of the Nazi killing machine, set a legal precedent.

Since then courts have handed down several guilty verdicts on those grounds rather than for murders or atrocities directly linked to the individual accused.

In July, German authorities confirmed they were investigating a 95-year-old man for his role as a Nazi guard at a prisoner of war camp where many Soviet soldiers died during World War II.

At the end of March, prosecutors announced they had dropped a case against a 95-year-old former Nazi death camp guard recently deported by the United States, due to a "lack of sufficient suspicion".

Still they trudge

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Although the government allowed passenger launches to operate till 6:00am yesterday, at least 60 launches plied this route till around 12:00pm. Besides, nine ferries plied in-rotation all day long.

All launches and ferries were filled to the brim with passengers. Many were seen travelling without following any health safety guidelines.

After crossing the Padma, they faced a shortage of vehicles and many had to share trips on CNG-run auto-rickshaws, motorbikes, pick-ups and trucks.

"I have been trying to go to Dhaka over the last two days but went back home seeing the huge crowd and rush. I seem to have no option to go to my workplace today," said Md Shaon Hossain, a resident of Madaripur's Shibchar upazila who works at a shopping bag-producing factory in the capital's Basabo area.

Speaking to The Daily Star from Shimulia terminal yesterday morning, he said, "Now [with no other mode of transport], I have to pay a higher sum to travel on auto-rickshaws or motorbikes."

Both Paturia and Aricha terminals were crowded with workers desperately looking for transport to return to the capital over the past three days.

"I work at a garment factory in Savar. Our factory officials yesterday [Sunday] called me over phone and asked me to join by today," said Rahima Begum, a resident of Faridpur's Alfadanga upazila.

She was talking to The Daily Star at the Paturia ferry terminal around 9:30am yesterday.

Along with passengers, a large number of private cars were crossing the Padma on ferries, said Md Zillur Rahman, deputy general manager (DGM-Commerce) of BIWTC's Aricha regional office.

Meanwhile in Gazipur, garment workers blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to protest the shortage of transport and the additional fare charged by available transport operators.

They blocked the highway in No.2 C and B areas in Gazipur's Sreepur upazila from around 7:00 to 9:00am, causing a gridlock on the highway.

(Our correspondents from Munshiganj, Manikganj and Gazipur contributed to the report.)