

# Busting myths galore over Covid-19 vaccine, SEWA sisters drive inoculation

Promote Vaccine Camps In Villages, Link Shots With Livelihood To Ensure Rural Women Get Vaccinated

Gujarat is among Indian states which saw the worst of Covid-19 second wave adversely impacting lives and livelihood like nothing else in recent memory. In such a scenario vaccination is deemed the only potent weapon to protect oneself against Coronavirus.

But SEWA sisters working in rural Gujarat share that getting the countryside population vaccinated is not an easy job as people weave a web of myths and lies of fear and scary outcomes with getting vaccinated.

From 'vaccine shot will kill us' to 'vaccination will render women infertile' sisters recounted numerous myths that villages have attached with Covid-19 shot. Villagers also fear missing out on daily income after falling sick from vaccination. But leading by example, sisters are working hard to bust these myths.

Mubarakben of Mehsana district enumerated stiff resistance put up villages especially in minority-dominated villages. "In one village, a written undertaking was made public saying 'Please do not insist on vaccinating us. We are ready to go to Allah's abode, if that is His will, but will not take the shot,'" she said.

"Another myth widely prevalent was that women who will take the Covid-19 jab will not be able to bear children in the future. Some believed women who get vaccinated will die in three months. We carefully worked to negate such myths and asked the community to allow a handful of willing members to take the shot as a test-case to show that these beliefs were just myths," said Mubarakben.

"When these few members got vaccinated sans any major side-effects, we could convince more women to join us. In all 80 women from the minority community in this village were vaccinated and work is on to inoculate more," said Parveenben, also working in Mehsana district.

In villages, SEWA sisters have facilitated public announcements through mikes extolling the need for vaccination and busting myths related to



vaccination. "A video was made by a daughter of SEWA members spreading awareness about the need for vaccination" Parveenben said.

Sisters say their move to link vaccination with livelihoods has fetched encouraging results. Deenaben Parmar of Anand said that a large number of men and women in the district got vaccinated after it was announced that milk brought dairy farmers will be bought only on presentation of vaccination card.

Deenaben narrated the case of two elderly women who were highly resistant to taking vaccine but took the jab when told that vaccination is must to claim PDS grains. She underscored such linkages would help in driving mass vaccination for Covid-19.

SEWA sisters have been working at removing administrative hurdles too to get the life-saving jab to women. "In Gagrej village, the vaccination center was kept in PHC's 4-7 kms away in the village, becoming a major deterrent to women's vaccination. We convinced authorities to hold a vaccine camp in the village resulting in 350 village women getting vaccinated," says Manjulaben.



Septuagenarian Shantaben shared her personal fear of getting vaccinated. "I actually thought one could die after taking Covid-19 vaccine. In fact, in our

village, women carried pots of water and neem leaves to the local deity to ensure Corona spares our village. But when government health officers created awareness about the importance of vaccines, I took the lead and got the vaccine with my husband. Now I personally convince and escort women to get the shot," said Shantaben with pride.

Anitaben of Chhota Udepur shared that the tribal population was especially wary of vaccination and resorted to hiding in villages to escape the shot being given by health officials.

"But we are convincing people about the possible third wave and how getting vaccinated can protect us from severe illness," said Anitaben.

Alkaben of Anand shared her experience of Gambhira village. "We created major vaccine awareness reminding them that if we want to safeguard ourselves against future virus waves, vaccines are the only way forward. We told them they will get minor side effects like body pain and fever and encouraged them to eat Paracetamol and lots of water. Our efforts paid off and we have been able to mobilize 75% villagers to get jabbed. We are still working towards 100% compliance."

In urban areas too, SEWA sisters narrated that while vaccination was high, there was a chunk of women who were loath to get vaccinated. Jassiben of Ahmedabad said some women insist if dying

of Corona is their destiny, so be it. "We have been tirelessly advocating for such women to get vaccinated as not taking vaccines exposes their family to virus risk too. We will not give up till all women are protected," said Jassiben.

Senior SEWA leaders applauded SEWA sisters' work in pushing vaccination and encouraged them to continue their awareness measures to convince even the most reluctant women and their family members to ensure 100% vaccination. Stop not till the goal is reached, the women were told.

## MYTHS

- Instant death after vaccination
- Death three months after vaccination
- Women will not be able to conceive after taking shot
- Severe illness after getting vaccinated
- Missing work due to prolonged illness after vaccination

## AWARENESS

- SEWA sisters lead by example, taking shots with family and demonstrating vaccine is safe
- Holding vaccine camps in villages for mass vaccination
- SEWA daughters make video extolling benefits of vaccination '
- Holding dialogue with minority community leaders to convince vaccine is safe
- Creating awareness about minor side effects that can be managed by paracetamol
- Mobilizing more women to ensure 100% vaccination
- Linking vaccination with livelihoods. For instance, buying milk only from dairy farmers who are vaccinated.