UNICEF support to the COVID-19 surge in India as part of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A)

The reach and capacity of the cold chain system in India is strengthened to sustain the massive COVID-19 vaccine drive

- UNICEF has worked at the request of MoHFW to augment the cold chain network across the country since third quarter of 2020. In preparation of the launch of vaccination drive, additional cold chain equipment, such as a Walk-In Cold Rooms (WIC), Walk-In Freezer Rooms (WIF), fridges and deep freezers were procured to enhance vaccine storage at all levels. Vaccine transportation passive devices (cold box/vaccine carriers) were also procured to support the vaccination rollout.
- The vaccine rollout was launched nationwide on the 16th of January 2021, with priority to Health Care Workers, Frontline Workers and people aged 60 years and above. On 1st April 2021, vaccination was made available to those above the age of 45. Over 156 million vaccine doses have been administered as of 1st May 2021, Day 106 of the vaccination campaign, making India the country with the fastest vaccination scale up in the world.
- As of May 1st, vaccine eligibility has been expanded to all above the age of 18. With this expansion and to support equitable access to vaccination even in remote areas, UNICEF will/ plans to further augment bulk storage sites by providing additional equipment (WIC/WIF) along with Solar Direct Drive (SDD) Fridges for remote locations with limited power supply.
- Current COVID-19 vaccines in use in India are freeze sensitive. In order to safely transport vaccine without any episode of freezing, UNICEF will procure additional User-Independent Freeze Free (UIFF) Vaccine Carriers and Freeze Tags for the cold chain network.
- To ensure the maintenance of the cold chain network, UNICEF will procure spare parts to ensure smooth functioning by ensuring that the sickness rate and breakdown time are kept to a minimum so that vaccine storage capacities can be utilized optimally.

Coverage and quality of critical services to the most vulnerable population groups is enhanced

- A key focus for UNICEF India is to address inequalities, in terms of access to basic services, including essential health services for women and children. COVID-19 may further disproportionately impact those with multiple vulnerabilities including those living in remote rural areas and the urban poor.
- UNICEF will provide technical support for planning and implementation of critical health interventions with emphasis on, but not limited to, the COVID-19 vaccination drive, in selective urban areas. The states include Uttar Pradesh and the 8 north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. These states are selected as most have limited public health structures and capacities and less engagement of development partners.
- Local customization, on ground monitoring and strong technical support will be key elements of the support UNICEF will provide. To ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccine, consultants will be deployed to enhance local level planning with the aim to increase quality and coverage of services for the most vulnerable and at-risk population.
Essential WASH services and supplies are strengthened in Healthcare Facilities dedicated to COVID-19 in UNICEF supported States and Districts

- Safe drinking water, improved hand hygiene and sanitation – including medical waste management - are crucial for Healthcare Facilities (HCF) in hotspots to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other transmissible diseases, particularly during the COVID-19 vaccination sessions.
- UNICEF aims to equip such HCFs with essential WASH supplies and services, notably hand touch free hand washing stations.
- Medical Waste Management is critical to avoid contamination in the facility and in surrounding environment and prevent related health hazards. This becomes particularly important with the surge in the number of people visiting healthcare facilities due to the vaccine campaign. UNICEF will support Healthcare facilities in hotspots to strengthen their waste management system by providing equipment and developing/rolling out of SOPs and relevant practices.
- UNICEF will support capacity building and training for healthcare staff and sanitation workers in practicing and promoting hand hygiene, managing medical wastes.

Uptake of COVID Appropriate Behaviour and Vaccination is enhanced in UNICEF supported States and Districts to reach over 20 million people

- Limited community engagement has been identified as a major gap, resulting in message fatigue and too much reliance on digital media. It is a challenge with only state level oversight and having a deeper presence, particularly in media dark and remote areas, can strengthen RCCE approaches and vaccine communication.
- The objective is to strengthen Community Engagement through temporary Social Mobilization Networks in states. These networks will coordinate the roll out of state specific campaigns such as Roko Aur Toko in Chhattisgarh, Jeetega Bihar, Stage on Wheels in Madhya Pradesh and Mask up in Odisha for adherence to COVID-19 Appropriate Behaviours and to also increase COVID-19 vaccination uptake. This support will help to intensify coordination with community structures, civil society organizations, self-help groups and village institutions
- UNICEF will engage in outreach media interventions critical for ensuring a systematic implementation of COVID Appropriate Behaviours and COVID-19 Vaccination campaign.
- UNICEF will support multi-media interventions as well as strengthen advocacy and media partnerships as part of the COVID-19 Response. UNICEF India will work towards further expansion of its supporter and audience base. COVID-19 campaigns have reached 4.2 billion people and UNICEF has recorded 6.5 billion impressions, 62 million engagements and half a billion video views.
- As the COVID-19 vaccine campaign continues across India, there is an urgency to scale-up communication initiatives, especially advocacy, media and content packs in multiple languages at state and national level to support the audience-centric campaign. In addition to the current partnerships, new and strong partnerships are required as part of advocacy, media and communication efforts.

Knowledge Management, including data collection, monitoring and assessment, and documentation is strengthened as part of UNICEF’s COVID-19 Response

- UNICEF will engage in monitoring and assessment of Social Behaviour Change Communication including dipstick assessments, U-Report based assessments and other telephonic and observation-based assessments.
- UNICEF will prioritize documentation of key findings and best practices for global application, scale up of programmes and develop future plans based on past and present performance and results.