

- Also, reports have emerged of trials in Bhopal where volunteers were seemingly under the impression that they were getting a protective shot when some were likely getting a placebo.
  - In medicine, a placebo is a substance, pill, or other treatment that appears to be a medical intervention, but is not.
  - Placebos are used when testing new drugs or sometimes when a patient has imagined his/her illness.
- Volunteers also complain of no medical follow-up when some developed symptoms such as fever, body pain and loss of appetite.

#### **What is the need for caution?**

- The vaccine may eventually prove protective. The adverse symptoms reported may also be seen as part of the variety of the human body's response.
- However, a vaccine that evokes distrust is self-defeating.
- With childhood immunisation, India has proven that it has the infrastructural backbone to inoculate millions.
- The dry runs to test the Co-WIN management software have reportedly given authorities valuable feedback on perfecting the prospective rollout.
- However, this could be undone if people do not turn up, and worse, if vaccine hesitancy rises.

#### **What lies ahead?**

- The pandemic gave India an opportunity to examine its dispensation of health care.
- Along with improving access, the government must seriously examine the conduct of vaccine trials.
- The government must work hard to bolster public trust in vaccination, and monitor the vaccination process for adverse reactions.
- On the other hand, Covaxin is best kept as a backup in the event of a sudden surge of cases till its efficacy data are available and acceptable.

### **5.3 Vaccine Hesitancy – COVID-19**

#### **What is the issue?**

The poor uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine in India indicates the gaps in government's approach in building public trust in this regard.

#### **How is the vaccine uptake rate?**

- Tamil Nadu, perceived to be largely health literate, and relatively well-equipped with health infrastructure, achieved only over 16% of its targeted coverage on the launch day (16 January 2021).
- On the second day of vaccination, the compliance further dropped.
- In some States, vaccination was suspended.
- A marked favouring of the Covishield vaccine over Covaxin was also noticed in multiple States.
- The poor rate of uptake of the vaccine in most States only indicates that the government has not taken the people of the country along in this process.

#### **Was vaccine hesitancy addressed?**

- A vaccine, unequivocally, is a public good.
- But the lack of transparency surrounding the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines has done little to enhance trust in this experiential principle.
- Studies measured high levels of vaccine hesitancy among the general population.
- It remains the same with health-care workers, the first in the line list of people to receive free vaccination.
- Clearly, vaccine hesitancy was not addressed sufficiently, or not taken seriously enough.
- The clearance for Emergency Use Authorisation (in Covaxin, it is emergency use authorisation in 'clinical trial mode') came.