

- Vaccination

Measles shots effective against Covid in kids, clinical trial needed: Study

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Measles-containing vaccines (MCVs) might offer children some protection against Covid-19 infection, shows early evidence from a study by researchers from BJ Medical College in Pune.

The case-control study analysed 548 participants (aged 1 to 17) who were split into two groups — those who have tested positive for Covid (via RT-PCR) and those who haven't. Researchers found the MCVs had vaccine effectiveness of 87.5% against SARS-CoV-2 and that vaccinated participants had less severe Covid symptoms than the unvaccinated.

The Pune findings support a much-discussed hypothesis that children are fairly protected against SARS-CoV-2 because of 'non-specific immunity' following inoculation with live attenuated vaccines, including measles-containing vaccines (MCVs) and the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) shot. The measles vaccine has been part of India's universal immunisation programme for the last 36 years.

The BJ Medical College research was published in the peer-reviewed international journal, Human Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics, this month.

The researchers said although their findings are encouraging, larger trials would be needed before a definitive conclusion can be made. "The results of our study indicate that MCVs can be effective against SARSCoV-2 infection in the paediatric population. This finding, however, needs to be confirmed further through prospective randomised clinical trials," said paediatrician Nilesh Gujar, the study's lead investigator.

In India, the measles vaccine is given at 9 months and 15 months. In 2018, the Centre launched the measles-rubella elimination campaign to cover children under 18 who had not received the vaccine at these ages. The children enrolled in the Pune study had documented evidence of vaccination.

The impact of Covid has been less on the paediatric population compared to adults. But experts have said children can be important facilitators in the transmission of the virus. Currently, only the Pfizer vaccine has been approved for children (aged 12-15). Trials are on in India to find a suitable shot for children.

As per available data, during 2019-2020, nationwide coverage of the first dose of measles-containing vaccine ranged between 72.5% and 96.2%. Second dose coverage ranged between 11.7% and 44.4%.

The researchers said their study assessed the MCV's effectiveness against Covid and not its efficacy. "Efficacy is the degree to which a vaccine prevents disease, and possibly transmission, under ideal and controlled circumstances (comparing a vaccinated group with a placebo group). Effectiveness refers to how well it performs in the real world," said vaccine researcher Prasad Kulkarni, one of the investigators of the study.

Other members of the team included Muralidhar Tambe, Malangori Parande, Nandkumar Salunke, Ganesh Jagdale, Sarah Anderson, Abhijeet Dharmadhikari and Anand Lakhkar. Infectious diseases expert Sanjay Pujari, member of the National Task Force on Covid-19 said, "Science is incremental, in a sense that it goes on adding to existing knowledge. Such studies add up to what we already knew and bolster them."