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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-331**

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## **Coronavirus | Tribals in Odisha flee villages fearing inoculation**

Fearing that the Covid vaccine shot may result in their deaths in a few years, people in a tribal village of Rayagada district of southern Odisha fled their homes on Wednesday.

Health department officials said people of Champakana village of Rayagada's Kolnara block fled hours before the team from Kolnara community health centre arrived there. "Almost all the doors in the village were locked after we reached there around 8am. We waited for them for the next 2-3 hours, but as no one turned up, we wound up the camp," said Dr G Shailaja, medical officer of Kolnara community health centre.

Health officials were aware of vaccine hesitancy among the 500-odd Kond tribals in the village and organised an awareness drive on Monday. At the meeting attended by local sarpanch, faithhealers and witchdoctors, the tribals expressed their reluctance to get the jab. "They had seen some video which said that whoever who gets the vaccine would die within 2-3 years. We tried hard convincing them that doctors and health workers have also taken the vaccine," said Shailaja.

Aware of vaccine hesitancy, the medical team took 100 doses of Covishield with them on Wednesday. “We discussed the importance of testing and vaccination with the villagers of Mukundpur, Kailashpur and Rekhapadar. We hope they realise the gravity of the situation and get jabbed,” said block programme officer Kalpana Mishra.

Health officials have also faced stiff resistance from the villagers over Covid testing. A few days ago, a medical team in Kolnara block was driven away after it arrived for Covid testing in Goudalelibadi vilage. Two persons in the village had earlier tested positive for Covid-19.

Rayagada district collector Saroj Mishra said vaccine hesitancy is a matter of worry. “While vaccine hesitancy has come down among Niyamgiri’s Dongaria Kondhs, a particularly vulnerable tribal groups, it is still there among other tribals. Many of the villagers are scared after seeing a fake video that claims people who get jabbed would die within two years,” said Mishra.

So far 167,000 doses of vaccine have been administered in the district of which 132,000 were first doses. About 6,000 persons in the age group of 18-45 have also taken the vaccine in the district. The district collector said that at least one third of the total number of Dongaria Kondh tribals have taken the jab since last month.

Facebook's Covid-19 Symptom Survey in India last month showed that India's vaccine hesitancy rate is around 28.7% with variations across states and Union Territories.

To be sure, while overall vaccine supplies may be there at the state level, individual vaccination centres may run out of stock on account of how the states manage their replenishments.

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