

Special Bulletin

from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health



Date: March 19, 2021

To: Nova Scotia Health Care Providers (including 811/911)

Re: Updates on COVID-19 Vaccine Program **including AstraZeneca**

- Cases of thrombosis and thrombocytopenia, some presenting as mesenteric vein or cerebral vein/cerebral venous sinus thrombosis, have been reported in Europe in persons who had recently received AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, mostly occurring within 14 days after vaccination. Approximately 20 million people in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe had received the vaccine as of March 16 and the European regulator reviewed 7 cases of blood clots in multiple blood vessels (disseminated intravascular coagulation [DIC]) and 18 cases of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST). The majority of reports involved women under 55, although some of this may reflect greater exposure of such individuals due to targeting of particular populations for vaccine campaigns in different jurisdictions.
- The number of reported events exceeds those expected, and causality, although not confirmed, cannot be excluded. However, given the rarity of the events, and the difficulty of establishing baseline incidence since COVID-19 itself is resulting in hospitalizations with thromboembolic complications, the strength of any association is uncertain.
- The European and UK regulators (European Medicines Agency, Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency) considers that the benefit-risk balance of the AstraZeneca vaccination remains positive, and there is no association with thromboembolic disorders overall.
- Health Canada concurs with this assessment and confirmed on March 18, 2021 that the benefits of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in protecting Canadians from COVID-19 continue to outweigh the risks and encourages Canadians to get immunized with any of the COVID-19 vaccines that are authorized in Canada.
- Health Canada is taking steps to update package leaflet with information on cases of DIC and CVST that have occurred.
- Healthcare professionals are urged to be alert for possible cases of thromboembolism, DIC or CVST occurring in vaccinated individuals.
- Healthcare providers should inform their patients to seek immediate medical attention for symptoms of thromboembolism and especially signs of thrombocytopenia and cerebral blood clots such as easy bruising or bleeding and persistent or severe headaches particularly beyond 3 days after vaccination.

Patients should be informed:

AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is not associated with an increased overall risk of blood clotting disorders. However there have been very rare cases of unusual blood clots accompanied by low levels of blood platelets (components that help blood clot) after vaccination. The reported cases were almost all in women under 55 years of age. Because COVID-19 can be so serious, the benefits of the vaccine in preventing disease outweigh the risk of side effects.

However, if you get any of the following symptoms after receiving the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccination seek immediate medical assistance and ensure you inform your health care provider that you received the vaccine:

- Breathlessness
- Pain in the chest or stomach
- Swelling or coldness in an arm or leg
- Severe or worsening headache or blurred vision after vaccination
- Persistent bleeding
- multiple small bruises, reddish or purplish spots or blood blisters under the skin

Nova Scotia Vaccine Program

- Patients aged 60-64 are currently booking appointments with physicians and pharmacists to receive COVISHIELD/AstraZeneca vaccine. Clinics begin March 20, 2021.
- While the consent form and patient information sheets are being updated to include this information on AstraZeneca, current patients may not be aware of this information. **Please ensure your patient is aware of the patient information above prior to vaccination.**