

Information on AstraZeneca vaccine in response to new vaccine safety concerns

9 April 2021

OFFICIAL

The Victorian Department of Health acknowledges your support and assistance in disseminating information about the program and the pathways to vaccination services to date. Please share this information with among your networks as this may impact upcoming plans for vaccination.

As you may already be aware, there has been an update to the advice on the use of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. This advice was provided by the Australian Technical Advisory Group of Immunisation (ATAGI). ATAGI is a group of medical and technical experts who advise the Commonwealth Minister for Health on the medical administration of vaccines in Australia, including COVID-19 vaccines.

There is evidence of rare but serious side effect involving thrombosis (blood clotting) after people receive their first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine.

- The risk of developing this side-effect following receipt of the AstraZeneca vaccine is extremely rare.
- The new age-based recommendations are made out of an abundance of caution and the benefits of the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccination outweigh the risks for the vast majority of people.

As a result of this evidence the Australian Technical Advisory Group of Immunisation (ATAGI) on 8 April 2021 provided the following recommendations regarding the Australian vaccination rollout:

- The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred over AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in adults aged under 50 years who have not already received a first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine.
 - This advice is based both on the increased risk of complications from COVID-19 with increasing age (and thus increased benefit of vaccination), and the potentially lower, but not zero, risk of blood clotting (thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome) with increasing age.
 - People who are under 50 years and are currently booked to receive their first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine should contact their provider and reschedule their appointment.
- AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine can be used in adults aged under 50 years where the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks for that individual and the person has made an informed decision based on an understanding of the risks and benefits. You should discuss your benefit-to-risk balance with your doctor.
- People who have had their first dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca without any serious adverse effects can be given their second dose. This includes adults under 50 years of age. People who have had blood clots associated with low platelet levels after their first dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca should not be given their second dose.

The Commonwealth Department of Health will develop resources and provide more information about the benefits and risks of AstraZeneca vaccine.

The ATAGI advice has significant implications for the Victorian rollout of the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination program, which will need to be worked through over the coming weeks. In the interim, state COVID-19 vaccination services will provide:

1. Access to Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for adults aged under 50 years who are part of a priority groups identified Commonwealth prioritisation framework (eligible Phase 1a and 1b).
2. Access to the AstraZeneca COVID-19 for eligible adults aged under 50 years requiring a second dose or eligible adults over 50 years requiring a first dose.

The Victorian Government will continue to work closely with the Australian Government on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. State COVID-19 vaccination service capacity is dependent on the supply of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine and AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

The following FAQs have been prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Health. As more information and resources are developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health we will share these with you. Victorians who have any questions about their health or about AstraZeneca should speak to their doctor.

COVID-19 Immunisation Program

COVIDvaccination@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Frequently asked questions

These FAQs have been prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Health

What is this side effect that everyone is talking about associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine?

There is evidence of a likely link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and an extremely rare blood clotting syndrome (thrombosis with thrombocytopenia).

The recommendation from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is that use of Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer) is preferred over AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in adults under 50 years old who have not already had a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Is the AstraZeneca vaccine safe?

Yes. The individual benefit-to-risk balance of vaccination with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine varies with age. This balance is based on factors including the increased risk of complications from COVID-19 with increasing age and the potential lower risk of this very rare, but serious, adverse event with increasing age. ATAGI has recommended the AstraZeneca vaccine remains safe to be given to people aged 50 years and over.

I have had my first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, what do I do now?

If you have had your first vaccine dose without this side effect or other serious adverse effects, you should receive your second dose as planned.

What if I am worried about side effects?

If you have recently had your first vaccine dose and are experiencing any side effects that you are worried about, I can book an appointment for you to see your doctor.

I'm booked in for my first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, what do I do?

If you are an adult aged under 50 years, you should only receive a first dose of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine where the benefit of receiving the vaccine clearly outweighs the risk in your individual circumstance. You may wish to discuss your individual benefit-to-risk balance with your doctor.

Generally, if you have not already received a first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, then the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred in adults aged under 50 years.

Information about how to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine will be available on the Department of Health website shortly.

You can also speak to your doctor about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

If you are 50 years of age or older, you can still receive your AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

Further information

- ATAGI statement

www.health.gov.au/news/atagi-statement-on-astrazeneca-vaccine-in-response-to-new-vaccine-safety-concerns

- Department of Health Secretary and Chief Medical Officer statement:

www.health.gov.au/news/joint-statement-on-covid-19-astrazeneca-vaccine-advice-from-atagi

- TGA statement:

www.tga.gov.au/media-release/astrazeneca-chadox1-s-covid-19-vaccine

- Victorian Department of Health statement

www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/statement-on-atagi-recommendations-9-April-2021