



Frequently asked questions

Change in advice – AstraZeneca

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What is the new ATAGI advice and how does it change eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine?

The Australian Technical Advisory group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has reviewed their advice on the AstraZeneca vaccine. They recommend Pfizer as the preferred vaccine for people aged under 60 years.

This doesn't change who is currently eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine, but it means the Pfizer is now the preferred vaccine for people under 60.

Why have they changed the advice on who should receive the AstraZeneca vaccine?

ATAGI have been meeting every week to review their advice on the AstraZeneca vaccine. Monitoring how vaccines are working in the community is a very important part of ensuring they are safe and effective, and are doing what they say they will.

The recommendation ATAGI have made is based on new evidence that has emerged that demonstrates a higher risk of TTS in the 50–59-year-old age group than initially thought.

The benefits of the vaccine still vastly outweigh any risk for people aged 60 and over

What is TTS?

TTS involves blood clots (thrombosis) and low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia). In Australia, symptoms of TTS have occurred between 4 and 28 days post-vaccination. The blood clots can occur in different parts of the body, such as the brain (called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis or CVST) or in the abdomen. The mechanism that causes TTS is not fully understood, but it appears to be associated with an immune reaction against the platelets in the blood which causes clotting.

What are the symptoms of TTS?

Symptoms of this rare clotting problem can include the onset of a serious, persistent headache and/or abdominal pain between 4 and 28 days after vaccination with AstraZeneca. These symptoms do not respond to over-the-counter pain medication.

As a precaution, if you experience these symptoms, you should go to your nearest hospital. It is important you tell health professionals that you have had a COVID-19 vaccine. At the hospital, a doctor will assess you and advise whether you need further tests as a precaution.

If you have a mild headache that responds to over-the-counter pain medication in the first three days after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, you do not need to attend hospital. If you are concerned about your health, you should speak to your doctor.

Is the AstraZeneca vaccine safe?

Yes. The individual benefit-to-risk ratio of vaccination with the AstraZeneca vaccine varies with age. This ratio 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 60 years and over.

The incidence of TTS is significantly lower in people aged 60 years and over. In addition, people aged 60 and over are more likely to become seriously unwell if they catch COVID-19.

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

If you have had your first vaccine dose without serious adverse effects, you should receive your second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine as planned. This is safe, and recommended by ATAGI.

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, you should speak with your doctor.

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

If you are aged under 60 years and you have not already received a first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, then the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred. You can book an appointment for your Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine by visiting www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment or calling 1800 675 398.

If you are 60 years of age or over, you can still receive your AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

I am aged 50 to 59 years old and have an appointment to receive my first AstraZeneca vaccine at my GP. Do I need to change my booking?

If you are aged 50 to 59 years and you have an appointment to receive your first dose of AstraZeneca, it is recommended you discuss your options with your doctor.

Do you have enough supply of Pfizer to accommodate the change?

The purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is the responsibility of the Australian Government. Victoria will continue to work with the Commonwealth Government to give access to COVID-19 vaccines as quickly as possible.

The Australian Government has indicated that a significant supply of Pfizer vaccine will also be available through some general practices in coming weeks.

Can people 'mix' vaccines?

You need to receive two doses of the same COVID-19 vaccine. Having different types of vaccine has not been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

Are there any serious safety risks associated with AstraZeneca vaccine?

Both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines have been studied in tens of thousands of people in clinical trials, and have been administered to many millions of people world wide. They are both very effective at preventing severe disease and hospitalisation.

Most side effects of both vaccines are mild and transient. They include reactions at the injection site and some systemic reactions, like headaches, fever, chills and fatigue. These are common in the first 48 hours after vaccination.

TTS is a rare, newly described condition that has been reported following administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine, almost exclusively after the first dose.

There has not been a higher overall rate of relatively common types of blood clots (including deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism) reported after AstraZeneca.

Why don't people over 60 get to choose the vaccine they want?

The AstraZeneca vaccine is highly effective at preventing death and severe illness among people who have contracted COVID-19 – and the incidence of TTS is very rare.

ATAGI considers that the individual benefit-to-risk ratio of vaccination with AstraZeneca in Australia varies with age. The risk of ongoing health issues and death from COVID-19 is highest in older age groups. In comparison, the rate, and thus possibility of disability and death from TTS may be higher in younger people. This age-specific benefit-to-risk ratio is demonstrated in [analysis from the UK](#).

The most effective way for eligible people aged 60 years and over to protect themselves from the risk of COVID-19 is to be vaccinated.

Who is ATAGI?

ATAGI is an independent group of medical experts who give advice to the Minister for Health on all matters regarding immunisation, particularly who will be prioritised first to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. You can learn more about ATAGI at www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines.

Which general practices are moving to administering Pfizer first?

The Australian Government has asked general practices already participating in the COVID-19 vaccine program whether they are interested in administering the Pfizer vaccine. While it is anticipated all participating general practices will be able to administer Pfizer later in the year, hundreds of general practices in Victoria are expected to receive Pfizer vaccine in July.