

Updated recommendations for AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines

Today a change has been announced in the use of AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines in Canada. Vaccines go through rigorous trials before approval and ongoing surveillance once the vaccine is in use in the population. When safety surveillance detects a signal, an investigation is initiated. At this time, a safety signal has been identified in Europe following use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

In several European countries, rare instances of cases of blood clots associated with a syndrome now called "vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia" (VIPIT) were detected in patients who received the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in the previous 4-20 days. The majority of affected patients thus far have been less than 55 years of age. While these reports are being investigated, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is recommending that the AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines not be offered to those less than 55 years of age in Canada.

Canada can take this step because we have other vaccine options available while the investigation is completed. Protection via immunization is the most effective prevention. Please continue to encourage your patients to receive COVID-19 vaccines available to them. For those over 55 years of age, AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines continue to be recommended as a safe and effective prevention measure against COVID-19 infection.

Health Canada has updated Section 7 Warnings and Precautions of both [product monographs](#) with information about these events.

Individuals receiving this vaccine should be reassured that these adverse events are very rare, and the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risk of COVID-19, which can lead to significant complications, including clotting disorders.

Anyone experiencing the following signs and symptoms 4-20 days after receiving COVISHIELD or AstraZeneca vaccine should seek medical attention promptly:

- prolonged headache beginning 4 or more days after vaccination
- blurred vision
- difficulty speaking
- seizure
- difficulty moving parts of the body
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- new severe swelling, pain or colour change of an arm or a leg
- persistent abdominal pain
- abnormal bruising, reddish or purple spots or blood blisters under the skin
- bleeding beyond site of vaccination

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Mark Lysyshyn

Vancouver: Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Alex Choi, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900

Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3170 | North Shore and Coastal Rural: Dr. John Harding 604.983.6701

The Ontario Science Table COVID-19 Advisory has issued [diagnostic and treatment guidelines](#). Individuals presenting with above symptoms in association with recent vaccination with AstraZeneca or COVISHIELD vaccines should have a CBC. Those with thrombocytopenia require further investigation. Treatment recommendations include use of direct oral anti-Xa inhibitors for anticoagulation (e.g., rivaroxaban, apixaban, edoxaban) as well as intravenous immunoglobulin, all under the guidance of a hematologist. Heparin and platelet infusions should not be used.

In addition to timely diagnosis and management, clinicians who identify vaccine recipients with VIPIT should report such cases to the [adverse events following immunization system](#) in BC.

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