1. What is happening with the AstraZeneca vaccine in New Brunswick?

Health Canada required AstraZeneca manufacturers to conduct a detailed assessment of the benefits and risks of the vaccine by age and gender in the Canadian context. In the interim, in an abundance of caution, New Brunswick followed the recommendation from Canada’s National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) to pause the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for individuals under 55 years of age in Canada. This is due to rare instances of blood clots for people in this age group following AstraZeneca vaccination reported in Europe known as vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT). To date, three such adverse events have been reported in Canada.

2. I've received the AstraZeneca vaccine. Should I be concerned?

This adverse event following vaccination is very rare.

The risk of COVID-19 remains far higher than the risk of an adverse event after receiving a vaccine. COVID-19 has killed more than 23,000 Canadians so far. About 1 in 100 Canadians who get COVID-19 end up needing intensive care and one in five Canadians who are hospitalized with COVID-19 develop blood clots.

3. What are normal side-effects of any vaccine including the AstraZeneca vaccine?

Minor and temporary adverse events, such as headache, fever, fatigue, or pain at the injection site, are common after all vaccinations.

4. What symptoms should I be concerned about?

Seek immediate medical attention if you develop symptoms such as shortness of breath, chest pain, swelling of arms or legs and/or persistent abdominal pain following vaccination.

Seek immediate medical attention if you develop severe or persistent worsening headaches or blurred vision within three weeks after vaccination, or you experience skin bruising or pinpoint round spots (other than at the site of vaccination).

5. Why continue to use the vaccine for people over 55?

In the rare circumstances where there have been serious side-effects reported in Europe, it has been in those under 55. The risk of developing serious illness and/or death from COVID-19 is far higher.

6. Will scheduled clinics using this vaccine still take place?

Planned clinics using the AstraZeneca vaccine have been postponed. Additional clinics will be scheduled and people will be contacted to book a new appointment.

7. Is the AstraZeneca vaccine safe and effective?

Remaining scheduled AZ clinics for those 55 and older will continue as planned. Those 55 and older have increased risk of complications from COVID, and the benefit of vaccine outweigh the risks. The risk of vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT) is 1 in 100,000 to 1 in 250,000.

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Our goal is to protect as many New Brunswickers as possible as quickly as possible. We will continue to assess lowering the recommended age based on an assessment and evaluation of the benefits and the risks in the New Brunswick context.

8. Can I get a different vaccine than AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD for my second dose?

Decisions on the type of second dose that will be offered to those who have been vaccinated with AstraZeneca vaccine will be determined based on the latest evidence and research. For now, you do not need a second dose for up to 16 weeks from your first dose.