

Information for NCC patients regarding the Astra Zeneca COVID19 (Vaxevria) vaccine

On 07/04/2021, the safety committee of the European Medicines Agency have confirmed that the benefits of the Astra Zeneca COVID19 vaccine in preventing severe COVID19 disease continue to outweigh the risk of side effects. However, it has also been stated that a rare adverse event can occur within 14 days of receiving the Astra Zeneca COVID19 vaccine (Vaxevria) which causes low platelet counts (a blood cell which clots the blood) and unusual blood clots, including in the veins of the head or abdomen. This rare side effect has been reported at a rate of approximately 4-10 cases per 1 million people, one of whom may die. These rare clotting events appear to be due to an unusual response from the immune system and Haematology specialists in Ireland are aware of the recommended blood tests and treatments if there is a suspicion of one of these rare cases.

Importantly, there is no evidence that the vaccine is linked to an increase in general blood clots (for example, deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism). Also, there is no evidence that age, gender or past medical history, including a past history of blood clotting or medications containing Oestrogen, increase the risk for this rare complication.

People who have a past history of clotting (thrombosis) or who have a bleeding disorder are not at higher risk of this rare complication and people with these conditions are being advised to take whichever vaccine that is offered to them, in accordance with the National vaccine roll-out. It is not recommended to take any additional medications or other actions if you have previously had a history of clotting and you have had or are about to have the AstraZeneca (Vaxevria) vaccine. If you are on an anticoagulant (blood thinner), you should continue to take this as prescribed.

COVID19 vaccines, including the AstraZeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine, play an important role in containing this pandemic infection and in preventing COVID19 disease, which can be a severe condition with an increased risk of thrombosis. The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) has recommended that the Astra Zeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine can be used as part of the vaccination programme in Ireland.

On 12th April 2021, NIAC updated recommendations relating to the AstraZeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine:

- any authorised COVID19 vaccine can be given to people aged 60 years and older, including those with medical conditions with very high or high risk of severe COVID19 disease.
- For people aged less than 60 years, who are yet to start a vaccination schedule, an alternative COVID19 vaccine will be offered in preference to the AstraZeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine.
- A second dose of the AstraZeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine will not be given to people who develop unusual blood clots with low platelets
- If people have received a first dose of the AstraZeneca (Vaxrevia) vaccine
 - where they are over 60 years or they have a very high risk or high risk medical condition, the second dose should be given 12 weeks later as scheduled.
 - where they are under 60 years and without any at risk medical conditions, the second dose will be extended to 16 weeks to allow time to gather more evidence about the risk of this rare complication after the second dose (none reported to date) and to review evidence being gathered on using a different vaccine for the second dose.

Information for vaccine recipients

- COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca is not associated with an increased overall risk of blood clotting disorders but there have been very rare cases of unusual blood clots accompanied by low levels of blood platelets (components that help blood to clot) after vaccination.
- Seek prompt medical assistance and mention your recent vaccination if you get any of the following 3 days or more after receiving the AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine:
 - breathlessness,
 - pain in the chest or stomach,
 - swelling or coldness in a 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
- Remember, some people will experience mild flu-like symptoms including headache, chills, fever and/or muscle aches. These are common side effects of any COVID-19 vaccine. These usually appear within a few hours and resolve within one or two days.

Advice for people who are on anticoagulants or have a bleeding disorder and are due to receive any COVID19 vaccine is available on the patient information tab of the NCC website (<http://www.stjames.ie/services/hope/nationalcoagulationcentre/>).