

MEMO

TO: Health Care Providers
FROM: Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, MD, MPH, and Chief Medical Officer of Health
DATE: March 29, 2021
SUBJECT: AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccines

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) continues to closely monitor reports from other countries exploring a possible link between AstraZeneca vaccine and Vaccine-Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia (VIPIT). Cases of thrombosis, associated with low platelets, including cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), have been identified four to 20 days post-vaccination with the AstraZeneca product. Estimates of incidence from various countries range from 1 in 125,000 to 1 in 1,000,000. Most of these cases have been in those under 55 years of age. In response to this signal, Health Canada has requested the manufacturer of AstraZeneca to provide a benefit risk analysis by age and sex stratification. AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD are both viral vector vaccines. Since mid-March, 2021, COVISHIELD has been delivered to over 4,000 individuals in NL, mostly first responders including career and volunteer fire fighters, police officers, border services, and search and rescue crew.

VIPIT has been associated with AstraZeneca vaccine, therefore, COVISHIELD is also being closely monitored. To date, there have no cases of VIPIT reported in Canada. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization has recommended a pause in the use of AstraZeneca vaccine in individuals less than 55 years of pending further risk analysis from the UK and Europe. The AstraZeneca vaccine continues to be efficacious in the prevention of moderate to severe disease and hospitalization and can still be offered to adults 55 years of age and older, given the risk of severe disease and death due to COVID-19 in this age group. We will be aligning with this strategy in Newfoundland and Labrador for both AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines.

The majority of vaccine provided in NL has been mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) which has a different mechanism of action. VIPIT has not been reported to be associated with mRNA vaccines.

Originally, most of the cases from Europe have occurred in women under the age of 55 – but many of these countries used more of their initial AstraZeneca vaccine supply in women under age 55. Most recently other countries have reported cases in males. VIPIT appears to be an immune response to the vaccine causing thrombotic thrombocytopenia. It does not appear that VIPIT is more common in people who have had blood clots before, people with a family history of blood clots, people with a low platelets, or pregnant women, because VIPIT does not develop through the same process as usual types of bleeding or clotting problems. This creates a challenge to identify a particular group who may be at risk for developing VIPIT post-vaccination. Experts

in Hematology have provided Canadian recommendations on the treatment and management of VIPIT. See link below for details.

[Vaccine-Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia \(VIPIT\) Following AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccination - Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table \(covid19-sciencetable.ca\)](https://www.covid19-sciencetable.ca)

Individuals who have previously received the vaccine are being advised to report any unusual events after immunization and seek medical attention. Minor and temporary adverse events, such as headache, fever, fatigue, or pain at the injection site, are common after all vaccinations, these individuals have been advised if symptoms are not severe, they can consult their primary care provider or call 811.

Individuals have been advised to go to the nearest emergency department immediately if they experience any of the following new or worsening symptoms in the 4 to 20 days after receiving Astra Zeneca or COVISHIELD vaccine:

- Persistent and severe headache
- Focal neurological symptoms
- Seizures
- Blurred Vision
- Shortness of breath
- Chest or abdominal pain
- Swelling and redness in a limb
- Pallor and coldness in a limb

Individuals should report recent vaccination with the COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine and provide vaccination date.

As more information becomes available updates will be provided. Please check the [Government of NL website](#) for most up to date information. We will continue to evaluate our vaccine roll out and make adjustments to our [NL COVID-19 Plan](#) as new information becomes available.

Resources:

National Advisory Committee on Immunizations:

[NACI rapid response: Recommended use of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in younger adults - Canada.ca](#)

Health Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2021/03/health-canada-taking-further-action-to-confirm-the-benefit-risk-profile-of-the-astrazeneca-vaccine.html>

Public Health Agency of Canada, Statement from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health:
[Use of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in younger adults - Canada.ca](#)