

Message regarding COVID-19 vaccines

Updated March 19, 2021 to include Health Canada statement

INFORMATION FOR YOUR PRACTICE

The following message can be used/adapted by your practice to address patient questions about the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine and the 16-week interval for all 2-dose vaccines.

Dear Patients,

In recent days, we have been receiving calls about concerns of blood clots with the AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccine, as well as questions regarding the time lag between first and second doses for all vaccines. Here is what we currently know:

- **Get the first vaccine made available to you** – Waiting for your ‘preferred’ vaccine risks potentially getting COVID-19 and associated illness. To best protect yourself and others, we agree that the best COVID-19 vaccine is the one that reaches your arm first. All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are highly effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.
- **There have been very rare cases of unusual blood clots accompanied by low levels of blood platelets (elements in the blood that help it to clot) after AZ vaccination** – [Health Canada](#) has assessed the data on reported events and determined that the AZ vaccine has not been associated with an increase in the overall risk of blood clots. Also, after a review of the 20 million AZ vaccinations completed so far in Europe and the United Kingdom, the [European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#), which evaluates drug safety, has said that AZ is a safe and effective vaccine and ***the benefits of the vaccine in protecting people from COVID-19 outweigh the risks of side effects***. The EMA advises patients should be aware of the remote possibility of such syndromes and should seek immediate medical attention and mention their vaccination if symptoms occur after getting the vaccine. Signs to watch for include:
 - breathlessness
 - pain in chest or stomach
 - swelling or coldness in an arm or leg
 - severe or worsening headache, particularly beyond 3 days after vaccination, or blurred vision after vaccination
 - persistent bleeding
 - multiple small bruises, reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters under the skin.
- **The 16-week interval time between doses is intended to protect more Ontarians, more quickly.** Due to still limited supply, all second doses for the 2-dose vaccines in Canada have now been moved up to a maximum of 16 weeks to ensure more people can receive the first dose of the vaccine. This decision was made by Canada’s Chief Medical Officer of Health based on [recommendations](#) from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).
- It will take some time to vaccinate everyone. Please continue to follow public health guidance of wearing a mask, physical distancing, avoiding crowded places, and washing your hands to protect yourself and your loved ones, especially as cases of COVID-19 continue to rise.

My office remains accessible to you, by phone, by video or in person, as needed. And I will continue to provide you with information and answer your questions about the vaccines and their availability when I have those details.

Stay safe.

Sincerely,