



Managing COVID-19 vaccine side effects

Resource for clinicians advising patients

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OFFICIAL

There has been a reported increase in patients presenting to emergency departments concerned about vaccine side effects and a rare side effect called thrombosis and thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS) which has been associated with AstraZeneca vaccine.

Following vaccination against COVID-19, clinicians are encouraged to discuss possible adverse events and their management with their patients, and talk to their doctor if they're concerned.

Key messages for patients

- Both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines have been studied in tens of thousands of people in clinical trials and have been administered to many millions of people worldwide. They are both effective at preventing illness, hospitalisation and death due to COVID-19.
- Most side effects of both vaccines are mild and go away after a few days. They include reactions at the injection site and some systemic reactions, like headache, fatigue, myalgia, and (less commonly) fever or chills. These expected side effects are common in the first 48 hours after vaccination and relate to the immune system responding to vaccination.
- The Australian Technical Advisory Group (ATAGI) [advises](#) the Pfizer vaccine is the preferred vaccine for people aged 16-59 years.
- For patients who receive AstraZeneca vaccine. They should be aware that TTS is a very rare, but serious condition which involves blood clots (thrombosis) and low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia). In Australia, symptoms of TTS have occurred between 4 and 28 days after the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. In Australia, there have been no cases of TTS after second doses of AstraZeneca vaccine reported to date. The blood clots can occur in different parts of the body, such as the brain (called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis or CVST) or in the abdomen.
- Early diagnosis and treatment improves the outcomes for patients with TTS. There are effective treatments for TTS.

TTS symptoms and precautions

- Symptoms of this rare clotting problem can include the onset of a serious, persistent headache and/or abdominal pain between 4 and 28 days after vaccination with AstraZeneca. Seek medical attention immediately if these symptoms do not respond to over-the-counter pain medication.
- If you have a mild headache that goes away with over-the-counter pain medication in the first three days after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, you do not need to attend hospital. This is an expected side effect associated with many vaccines.
- If you have had your first vaccine dose without serious adverse effects, you should receive your second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine as planned. This is safe and recommended by ATAGI. Second doses of vaccination are very important to have the highest level of protection against COVID-19.
- TTS is a rare and very specific form of clotting. AstraZeneca vaccine has not been associated with other, more common forms of clotting, including deep venous thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE).

Managing concerns about side effects

Patients that have had a COVID-19 vaccination and think they may be experiencing side-effects, can check the Healthdirect [COVID-19 vaccine side effect checker](#).

If the patient has unexpected symptoms, is concerned and it's not an emergency, they should:

- Talk to their doctor.
- Call [NURSE-ON-CALL](#) available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine helpline [1800 020 080](#).
- For information on after-hours healthcare options, visit the [Better Health channel](#).

When to seek urgent medical attention

- If the patient thinks they are having an allergic reaction. Call 000 if experiencing severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, wheezing, a fast heartbeat or collapsing.
- If the patient has any of the following symptoms, particularly around 4 to 28 days after vaccination:
 - Unusual headache that starts or persists for greater than 48 hours after vaccination, and which may be severe or may not improve following simple analgesia. Headache in the first 48 hours is a common adverse event following AstraZeneca vaccine, but is expected to resolve over 1-2 days.
 - blurred vision
 - weakness of face or limbs
 - confusion or seizure.
 - shortness of breath
 - chest pain
 - persistent abdominal pain
 - leg swelling
 - pin-prick rash or bruising not at the injection site that cannot be explained.

They should advise the medical practitioner they have recently received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Helpful tips for recipients after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine

Advise patients that side effects are normal and a sign that the vaccine is working.

Over the counter pain medications can be used to treat headache or muscle aches following vaccination. If symptoms persist, or the pain gets worse, or they're concerned, they should consult their doctor.

To reduce pain and discomfort at the vaccination site, people can:

- apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area
- use or exercise their arm.

To reduce discomfort from fever, advise people to:

- drink plenty of fluids
- dress lightly.

Advise people to call a doctor or healthcare provider if:

- the redness or tenderness at the vaccination site increases after 24 hours
- their side effects are worrying them or do not seem to be going away after a few days.

Resources

[Information on COVID-19 Astra Zeneca vaccine](#)

[Patient information on COVID-19 vaccine and thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome \(TTS\)](#)

[After your vaccination](#)