

USE OF AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD Vaccine

Frequently Asked Questions (April 20, 2021)

There are a lot of news reports about the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine.
Why is the use of these vaccines being changed?

Canada looks into all reports of adverse events (unexpected medical issues) that occur soon after vaccination with any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines. These systems are set up to find out if there are any rare risks from the vaccines being used that did not get picked up in safety trials. As new information comes in, our vaccination system is updated to ensure everyone's safety.

European reports of rare but serious cases of blood clotting events (Vaccine-induced Immune Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia or VITT) are a signal for our safety systems. A detailed assessment is now being done. Until this assessment is complete, British Columbia is pausing the use of AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccine in all Canadians younger than 40 years of age.

I'm 18-39 years old and received the COVISHIELD vaccine. I'm concerned about blood clots.
What should I look out for?

Blood clots are very rare events following immunization. If you have received a vaccine, please read the [Vaccination Aftercare](#) handout so you are aware of common symptoms that you might experience.

Some symptoms after a vaccine are of greater concern. If you have any of the following symptoms between 4 and 20 days after you are vaccinated, go to the nearest emergency department:

- Severe headache that does not go away
- Seizure
- Difficulty moving part of your body
- Blurry vision that does not go away
- Difficulty speaking; shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Severe abdominal pain
- New severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg
- Abnormal bruising, reddish or purple spots or blood blisters under the skin

Tell the healthcare providers who see you that you received the COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine and give them the date you were vaccinated.

If I got my first dose of the AstraZeneca or COVISHIELD vaccine, should I get the second dose, or will I get a different vaccine?

The use of AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines is currently paused for second doses and for people under age 40. If these vaccines are not recommended for you when it is time for your second dose, then public health will assess the latest information and will decide the type of second dose that you can receive.

Have there been cases of these serious blood clots for AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines in B.C.?

There have not been any reports of these very rare blood clotting events in BC. Outside of Canada, there have been some reports of blood clotting happening in anywhere from 1 to 10 in 1 million people. Adverse events continue to be monitored very closely.

Why is B.C. still using the COVISHIELD vaccine in people over 40?

These blood clotting events appear to be even rarer in this age group. The benefits in protecting people from COVID-19 through vaccination are much greater than these concerns about adverse events. This is especially important because of the increased risk of hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 for older people.

Are certain people more at risk of experiencing these blood clots after receiving the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine?

Most of the cases from Europe happened in women under age 40 although some have happened in men too.

We do not believe that these rare blood clotting events are more common in people with other risks of blood clots. People who have had blood clots before, people with a family history of blood clots, people with a history of low platelets, or pregnant people, are not expected to be at higher risk of vaccine associated bleeding or clotting problems.

Will certain groups of front-line workers continue to be prioritized for vaccine if AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD is not available?

Immunization of **priority front-line workers** (such as first responders, K to 12 educational and childcare staff, grocery store workers and more) under the age of 40 in advance of the age-based rollout will depend on supply and availability of mRNA vaccines in the place of COVISHIELD/AstraZeneca vaccines. The coordination and planning for ongoing prioritization of these groups is still underway.

I'd like to be able to choose the vaccine I receive. Why can't I do this?

All vaccines approved in Canada and available in B.C. are safe and effective and will help protect you against COVID-19. In clinical trials, those who got a vaccine had a high level of protection against COVID-19 infection, serious illness, and death.

B.C. recommends you take the vaccine that you are offered so you are protected as soon as possible. The sooner people have been immunized in our community, the harder it becomes for the virus to spread. That protects us all.

Will this change delay B.C.'s vaccine timeline and will the age-based schedule be pushed back?

No. B.C. is on track to receive enough COVID-19 vaccine doses to vaccinate every eligible person who wants one within the original timeline and phased roll-out. AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccine doses make up a small portion of the total doses expected (and AstraZeneca has yet to arrive in B.C.) so there is no expected delay to this timeline.