



Australian Government

Department of Health

Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer

COVID-19 Vaccination Program

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to provide important information about the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) and the Thrombosis and Haemostasis Society of Australia and New Zealand (THANZ) have released a joint statement (enclosed) on Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) and the use of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.

The joint statement provides updated information about TTS and reaffirms ATAGI's previous advice regarding the safe use of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine.

It provides greater clarity on the nature of TTS and narrows the conditions determined to be contraindications for use of the vaccine.

The statement confirms people with the following conditions can receive the AstraZeneca vaccine:

- History of blood clots in typical sites
- Increased clotting tendency that is not immune mediated
- Family history of blood clots
- History of ischaemic heart disease or stroke
- Current or past thrombocytopenia (low platelet count)
- Those receiving anticoagulation therapy

In providing you with this statement, I wish to reiterate that the risks associated with the use of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine and this new syndrome are rare.

Thanks to the engagement with medical experts such as ATAGI and THANZ and through the reporting of these cases to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), there is now a clear diagnosis and treatment pathway for responding to cases with TTS.

As of 20 May, the TGA has determined that there have been 21 confirmed and 4 probable cases of TTS in Australia and, tragically, one person has died. However, it is important to highlight that due to better awareness, early diagnosis and appropriate treatment, the outcome and prognosis of the majority of those who have experienced this syndrome is good. Pleasingly, 22 patients have already recovered and have been discharged from hospital.

ATAGI have determined that the benefit for those who are aged 50 years and older favours vaccination with AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine, when compared with the risk of this rare syndrome.

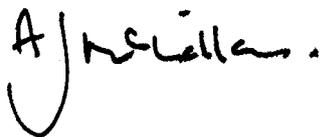
We are rapidly approaching the winter months and I am acutely aware from our own experience last year and from observations internationally about the effects of COVID-19 during winter. Any delays in vaccination during this period, has the potential for serious consequences on the health of all individuals, but particularly for those at risk of severe COVID.

It is on this basis, in line with the advice from ATAGI and THANZ, that I encourage you to ensure your patients and those presenting to clinics, aged 50 years and older are vaccinated with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

Additional information is available at www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines

Thank you for your ongoing support of the COVID-19 vaccination program.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. McMillan'.

Professor Alison McMillan
Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer
23 May 2021