

March 29, 2021

***** IMPORTANT NOTICE: Effective immediately, pause use of AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD in People aged < 55 years *****

In discussion with Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and jurisdictions across Canada, Manitoba public health officials are advising health care providers to pause on offering the AstraZeneca (AZ) / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine to people aged < 55 years until further notice. This is based on evidence of rare instances of vaccine-induced pro-thrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT) following AZ vaccination reported in Europe, with associated high mortality and other serious outcomes, occurring in anywhere from 1 in every 125,000 to 1 in 1 million people following vaccination with AZ COVID-19 vaccine. Most cases have occurred within 4 to 20 days of vaccination. To date, these adverse events have not been reported in Canada. A decision tree for diagnosing and ruling out VIPIT is available at: https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Science-Brief_AstraZeneca_General_20210326_published.pdf.¹

NACI is anticipated to imminently release a statement to this effect; it will be posted online at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci.html>. Manitoba will continue to review all of the evidence and update health care providers on the eligibility criteria and recommendations for use of AZ / COVISHIELD.

Public health officials advise that clients/patients ≥ 55 years of age can continue to be immunized with AZ/COVISHIELD. Community pharmacies and medical clinics that anticipate any difficulty with using their current COVISHIELD supply before the expiry date on the product label, can offer the vaccine to persons aged ≥ 65 years (regardless of priority 1 or 2 conditions).

Public health officials are advising health care providers to be alert to the signs and symptoms of thromboembolism and thrombocytopenia in persons aged < 55 years following vaccination with AZ/COVISHIELD. This may include shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling and persistent abdominal pain following vaccination. Additionally, be alert for neurological symptoms including sudden onset of severe or persistent worsening headaches or blurred vision several days after vaccination, skin bruising (other than at the site of vaccination) or petechiae starting a few days or more after vaccination. For more information, refer to: <https://covid-vaccine.canada.ca/info/pdf/astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-letter.pdf>. Note that active monitoring of clients/patients aged < 55 years is not required at this time.

¹ Pai M, Grill A, Ivers N, et al. Vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia VIPIT following AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccination. *Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table*. 2021;1(17). <https://doi.org/10.47326/ocsat.2021.02>

Information for health care providers about Manitoba's COVID-19 Immunization Program, can be found at: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/vaccine/healthcare-professionals.html> and <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/vaccine/partners/index.html>. Information on reporting AEFIs is available at: www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/aefi.html#rrp.

Sincerely,

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