

By Email Only

Date: April 16th, 2021

To: Healthcare workers

Re: AstraZeneca Vaccine update

Dear colleague,

I would like to thank you for your ongoing support and hard work in the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. To date, over a million vaccines have been administered in Ireland. This is a significant achievement and is enabling us to protect the most vulnerable and at-risk members of society. I am writing to update you on the most recent developments with regards to Vaxzevria® (AstraZeneca vaccine) and the changes which have been made to the vaccination roll out in response to the advice from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) safety committee assesses and monitors the safety of medicines, including COVID-19 vaccines. Following reports of cases of blood clots in people who had received the vaccine in European countries the EMA safety committee investigated if these were potentially linked to the Vaxzevria® vaccine. After reviewing all available evidence, the EMA safety committee decided to list unusual blood clots with low blood platelets as very rare side effects of Vaxzevria®. However, they concluded that **the overall benefits of the vaccine in preventing COVID-19 outweigh the risks of side effects.**

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC), the expert group that advises on vaccination in Ireland, reviewed the EMA findings and issued revised advice on the use of the Vaxzevria® in Ireland on April 12th, 2021.

Although these unusual blood clots are extremely rare and are estimated to occur between 4 and 10 in every 1 million people, in view of the serious nature of them, NIAC updated its recommendation on the use of Vaxzevria. As the risks and benefits of Vaxzevria® vaccine may vary with age NIAC recommended:

- Any authorised COVID-19 vaccine, including Vaxzevria **is recommended for those aged 60 years** and older including those with medical conditions with very high or high risk of severe COVID-19 disease.
- Vaxzevria is **not recommended for those aged under 60 years** including those with medical conditions with very high or high risk of severe COVID-19 disease.
- A second dose of Vaxzevria should not be given to anyone who developed unusual blood clots with low platelets after the first dose.



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Advice for those who have received a first dose of Vaxzevria is:

- Those aged 60 and older should receive their second dose 12 weeks later as scheduled.
- Those aged under 60 years with a very high risk or high-risk medical condition should receive their second dose 12 weeks later as scheduled.
- Those aged under 60 years without a very high risk or high-risk medical condition should have the scheduled interval between doses extended to 16 weeks to allow further assessment of the benefits and risks as more evidence becomes available

COVID-19 vaccinations including Vaxzevria® are vital in ending the pandemic. All medical treatments have potential harms as well as potential benefits and it's important to be able to weigh these against each other. Across all ages, both EMA and NIAC agree, the Vaxzevria® vaccine is safe and effective at preventing COVID-19 illness, reducing hospitalisation and deaths and that the benefits outweigh the risks.

More than 235,000 doses of Vaxzevria® have been given to people in Ireland so far, mainly to frontline healthcare workers, and we can already see the significant reduction in cases of COVID-19 disease in our frontline healthcare workers as a result of the vaccination programme. It is important that we continue to protect our staff and patients by completing second dose vaccination of healthcare workers in line with the new guidance issued by NIAC. Healthcare workers under 60 who have not yet received their first vaccine dose will receive an alternative vaccine in accordance with the government's allocation groupings.

It is understandable that some people will have questions or may be apprehensive about Vaxzevria®. I am writing to assure you that the benefits of the vaccination far outweigh the risks of severe disease, hospitalisation and death due to COVID-19. However, if you do have questions or concerns please discuss them with your doctor or local Occupational Health Department. Further information and answers to frequently asked questions can be found on the HSE website at the following link:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/covid19vaccineinfo4hps/astrazeneca/azqnda.pdf>

Once again, I would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication in protecting us all. We are now seeing the real-world effect of the vaccination programme which is helping move us towards what I hope will be a much brighter future for everyone.



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With thanks and kind regards,

Dr Colm Henry
Chief Clinical Officer