

Having a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is one way we can protect our community against coronavirus. COVID-19 vaccines help to prevent serious illness and death from COVID-19, and they are free for everyone in Australia. COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out to people across Australia in phases, with those most at risk receiving their vaccinations first.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ME TO GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Catching COVID-19 can be serious and may lead to death, illness that requires hospital admission and/or long-term complications, especially in older people and those with underlying medical conditions. You can have COVID-19 without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends and colleagues, many of whom may be at increased risk. Being healthy does not reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on.

WHO CAN RECEIVE THIS VACCINE?

People aged 18 years and older can receive COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.

WHO SHOULD NOT RECEIVE THIS VACCINE?

You should not receive this vaccine if you have previously had any of the following:

- anaphylaxis to a previous dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca or to an ingredient of the vaccine
- thrombosis with thrombocytopenia occurring after the first dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca
- a past history of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis, heparin induced thrombocytopenia, splanchnic (mesenteric, portal, splenic) vein thrombosis or antiphospholipid syndrome with thrombosis

WILL THE VACCINE PROTECT ME?

Clinical trials and mass vaccination programs overseas have shown that COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca is very effective in preventing COVID-19 symptomatic infection, hospitalisation and death. However, no vaccines are ever 100% effective, so there is a small chance that you can still develop COVID-19 infection after vaccination. This is why it is important to continue with other preventative measures such as physical distancing, hand washing, and COVID-19 testing and isolation should symptoms arise.

HOW IS THE VACCINE GIVEN?

The vaccine course is 2 doses, with the second dose given around 12 weeks after the first dose. Although you get some protection about 3 weeks after the first dose, the second dose is needed to give you stronger and longer-lasting protection.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE?

The COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca was initially shown to be safe in large clinical studies of tens of thousands of people. It has subsequently been monitored for safety issues after being given to millions of people around the world.

Serious side effects are rare, with the rate of *anaphylaxis* being 1 case per million doses administered, and the rate of *thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)* in Australia being around 14 cases per million doses administered in those aged 50 years and over and around 28 cases per million doses administered in those aged under 50 years old.

Mild side effects such as pain, tenderness or local swelling (in the arm where had your injection), feeling tired, headache, general muscle aches, fever, chills, joint pain and nausea are common. These symptoms normally go away in a few days.

WHAT IS THROMBOCYTOSIS WITH THROMBOCYTOPENIA SYNDROME (TTS)?

TTS involves blood clots (thrombosis) and low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia), and occurs around 4 to 30 days after vaccination. It is different from other blood clotting conditions and is triggered by the immune system's response to the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca. The blood clots can occur in unusual sites for clots, such as the brain (cerebral venous sinus thrombosis) or in the abdomen (splanchnic vein thrombosis).

Based on studies of cases of TTS to date, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) and the Thrombosis and Haemostasis Society of Australia and New Zealand (THANZ) have advised that the risk of TTS is unlikely to be increased in people with the following conditions, and people in these groups can safely receive COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca:

- History of blood clots in typical sites such as in the legs or lungs
- Increased clotting tendency that is not immune mediated eg Factor V Leiden
- Family history of blood clots
- History of ischaemic heart disease (including heart attacks) or stroke
- Current or previous history of low platelet count
- Currently receiving anticoagulation medications (blood thinners)

TTS can now be treated effectively. Clinical awareness of TTS is high, suspected cases are rapidly investigated in Australia, and the majority of people with TTS in Australia have recovered well.

CAN I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE AND THE FLU VACCINE?

Giving a COVID-19 vaccine and a flu vaccine on the same day is not recommended. The preferred minimum interval between a dose of COVID-19 vaccine and dose of flu vaccine is 14 days.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-information-on-covid-19-astrazeneca-vaccine>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/joint-statement-from-atagi-and-thanz-on-thrombosis-with-thrombocytopenia-syndrome-tts-and-the-use-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/atagi-update-following-weekly-covid-19-meeting-19-may-2021>

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/vaccine/Documents/az-info-sheet.pdf>