Statement on the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine and rare reports from Europe of blood clots associated with low platelets occurring post-vaccination

On behalf of the Infectious Diseases Committee of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada

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On March 18th, 2021 the safety committee of European Medicine Agency (EMA) released a statement related to the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine and a possible link to rare blood clots associated with low blood platelets. In this statement, they shared information related to a review of rare cases (25 cases in 20 million people vaccinated in the United Kingdom and the European Economic Area) of blood clots associated with disseminated intravascular coagulopathy. Of these 25 cases, most individuals were reported to be females under 55 years of age and 9 deaths have been reported. A causal link with the vaccine has not been proven, but is under detailed review. The European data supports that the vaccine is not associated with an increase in the overall risk of blood clots when the general vaccinated population is considered.

Several jurisdictions in Europe briefly paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, however, after the EMA review results, it’s use has been resumed in a number of European jurisdictions and is supported by the World Health Organization. Post-marketing surveillance is ongoing at a global scale and is designed to identify rare adverse events that then require further investigation for possible association with vaccination. Regulatory bodies, including those in Canada, continue to evaluate the evidence as it emerges.

The risks associated with COVID-19 infection, notably the need for hospitalization, intensive care, mechanical ventilation, and death are more likely following infection with COVID-19 than the very rare adverse events described above. Moreover, pregnant women represent a group of individuals at higher risk of morbidity associated with COVID-19 compared to their non-pregnant comparators. Currently, the SOGC supports that the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine’s efficacy for preventing severe COVID-19 infection outweighs the extremely small likelihood of developing blood clots or disseminated intravascular coagulopathy. The SOGC continues to support the concept that ‘the best vaccine is a COVID-19 vaccine’ and supports the use of all COVID-19 vaccines available in Canada for pregnant women based on eligibility by jurisdiction, individual risk factors and autonomous choice to be vaccinated.

The SOGC continues to monitor the situation closely and will update the statement as the situation evolves.
References


