

Safety of the COVID-19 Vaccine and Haematology patients

29 April 2021

DISCLAIMER Information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic changes on a daily basis. By the time you read this, there may be updated information. Please always refer to government websites for up to date information and recommendations.

At TBU we have taken many calls from patients and colleagues regarding the safety of the COVID vaccines. Many people are concerned about the very rare complication of thrombosis with low platelets, or **VIPIT** (Vaccine Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia).

The data continue to emerge but the current recommendation from the Australian Regulators which is endorsed by the Australian Haematology community is that

- a) COVID vaccination remains key to our emergence from this pandemic. The Astra Zeneca vaccine is the predominant vaccine available in Australia and is considered vital to reduce the incidence of serious illness and death from COVID.
- b) VIPIT is extremely rare, about 1 in 250-300,000 vaccinations using the Astra Zeneca vaccine
- c) COVID vaccinations are recommended in most individuals unless there is a specific reason not to (see below)
- d) For safety, adults under the age of 50 should receive the Pfizer vaccination by preference
- e) This may mean a longer wait for a vaccine for our patients under the age of 50 who would normally fit into the Phase 1b vaccination group (individuals with a serious underlying medical condition). The Pfizer vaccine is still in short supply and can only be given in specialised vaccination centres that have access to minus 80 degree storage.

There is no evidence that VIPIT is more likely in people who have had a blood clot in the past, or who have a family history of clots, nor in pregnancy or in people with low platelets due to immune thrombocytopenia or other causes. The clots seen in 'regular' deep vein thrombosis are caused by a very different mechanism to the clots seen in VIPIT. Regular DVT is common but VIPIT is extremely rare.

(Continued overleaf)

Is there anyone who should NOT get the vaccine?

At this stage the only people who are advised not to get the Astra Zeneca vaccine are:

1. People under the age of 50
2. People who have had a past clot in a vein in the brain
3. People who have had the rare complication of low platelets due to Heparin or Clexane injections

More about VIPIT

What is it?

VIPIT is a rare condition characterised by serious blood clots including in the brain and abdominal vessels, in association with low platelets (the cells in our blood which form clots and normally stop bleeding). VIPIT is rare, with rates of between a 1 in 125,000 to 1 in 1 million people.

Am I more likely to get VIPIT because I have a blood disorder with low platelets or blood clots?

Currently, there are no defined risk factors identified for VIPIT. Most cases have been women under the age of 50 but this may simply be because many countries have prioritised vaccinations for health care workers (a profession with a predominance of female workers).

For more information regarding Covid-19 vaccine eligibility, please visit the DHHS Covid-19 vaccine website using the link below for more details

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine>

The Blood Unit Haematology Team