Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Office of the Chief Clinical Officer
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BY EMAIL ONLY

Deputy Bríd Smith
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

23/06/2021

PQ 22510-21 Re: AstraZeneca - To ask the Minister for Health if he will facilitate the request of any person with a history of or a condition that makes them susceptible to blood clotting to opt for another vaccine other than a particular vaccine (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Smith

Thank you for your email regarding the suitability of the Vaxzevria COVID-19 vaccine (also called the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine) for this family given the history that has been shared.

Firstly, I would like to outline the current situation with the Vaxzevria COVID-19 vaccine. In April 2021, following reports of a small number of clotting events in patients who had recently received the Vaxzevria vaccine from multiple European countries (not including Ireland), the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) safety committee commenced an investigation to assess whether any link between these events and the vaccine could be shown. It's important to state at this point that the reported adverse events were a very particular presentation; a combination of clots in the blood supply for the brain or the gut and also a decrease in a type of blood cell called platelets and were extremely rare (between 4-10 cases per million people). The majority of these adverse events were seen in women aged under 60 and no specific risk factors for developing these side effects was shown.

Following their investigations, the EMA stated that while it was plausible that these events were caused by the Vaxzevria vaccine, they are extremely rare and the overall benefits of the Vaxzevria vaccine in preventing COVID-19 far outweighed the risk of side-effects. Taking these findings into account, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee in Ireland decided to limit the use of Vaxzevria vaccine to those aged 50 years and older. This is because we have evidence that persons aged over 50 have a much higher risk of severe outcomes (including ICU admission and death) from COVID-19 than of developing this extremely rare side effect. This evidence is even stronger in persons aged over 65.

The HSE has sought advice from the National Coagulation Centre and they have advised that no previous history of clotting disorders, nor a history of heparin induced thrombocytopenia is a contraindication to receiving the Vaxzevria vaccine. The only contraindication to receiving Vaxzevria vaccine is an allergy to the vaccine or any of its constituents. It is currently not possible to choose which COVID-19 vaccine to receive and we would strongly advise that people avail of the first vaccine that is offered to protect her from COVID-19 disease as soon as possible.

I hope this provides you with assistance.

Yours faithfully

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Sharon Hayden
General Manager
Office of the CCO