

Media Release

Date: 15 March 2021

States of Guernsey responds to the temporary suspension of AstraZeneca vaccine in other jurisdictions

At the media briefing on Friday 12 March 2021, Deputy Al Brouard – President of the Committee *for* Health & Social Care commented on the recent news that Denmark and a small number of other countries have decided to temporarily suspend the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine following reports that it had caused blood clots in a very small number of patients.

Deputy Brouard confirmed that the decision had not been made by the relevant medicine safety regulatory body - the European Medicines Agency (EMA). In fact the EMA had stated that there was no evidence that the vaccine had caused the conditions reported.

Dr Phil Bryan, the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) Vaccines Safety Lead has issued a response as follows:

‘Vaccine safety is of paramount importance and we continually monitor the safety of vaccines to ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential risks.

It has not been confirmed that the report of a blood clot, in Denmark, was caused by the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.

The Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic authorities’ action to temporarily suspend use of the vaccine is precautionary whilst they investigate.

Blood clots can occur naturally and are not uncommon. More than 11 million doses of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca vaccine have now been administered across the UK.

Reports of blood clots received so far are not greater than the number that would have occurred naturally in the vaccinated population.

The safety of the public will always come first. We are keeping this issue under close review but available evidence does not confirm that the vaccine is the cause.

People should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine when asked to do so.'

The Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is also considering cases of thromboembolic events related to AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, but the organisation says the benefits of vaccination currently still outweigh risks.

"The number of thromboembolic events in vaccinated people is no higher than the number seen in the general population," the EMA said in statement.

The Bailiwick has delivered 26,965 doses of vaccine – of which 10,315 were the AstraZeneca vaccine. Whilst a small number of those who have received the vaccine have reported side effects (in line with those identified by the manufacturers and the MHRA), no one has reported an issue with blood clots.

Dr Nicola Brink, Director of Public health said:

'As in the UK, we are keeping the situation under careful review and the safety of islanders will always come first. Based on the information we have, islanders it is our recommendation that islanders should still come forward for vaccination when they are called.

We know that people reading and listening to the news will be worried about having their vaccination if they have been allocated the AstraZeneca vaccine. Unfortunately it is not possible for people to be able to choose which vaccine they are given. The doses are allocated according to our delivery schedules.

We will continue to monitor the information from the EMA, the MHRA and the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation) JCVI and will provide updates on their investigations in to the very small numbers of cases who developed blood clots. Updates will be given as regularly as we are able.

In the meantime, the benefits of having the vaccine far outweigh any potential risks or side effects and we would urge everyone who has been invited to have the vaccine so far to attend their appointments - or schedule their appointments as soon as possible.'

Dr Peter Rabey, Medical Director agreed saying:

‘There is no conclusive link between the vaccine and the cases and therefore islanders should come forward to receive their vaccine. We have seen the benefits of the vaccination programme in the second wave of infection in Guernsey where many of the most vulnerable islanders were protected against the severe consequences of infection. I would therefore also encourage islanders to come forward for vaccination’

The Vaccine Contact Centre team who schedule the vaccine clinics are unable to provide callers with any medical advice. If you would like advice based on your current medical circumstances you should contact your relevant medical practitioner.