

NEWS | VACCINE ROLLOUT

Pause for effect: 'No evidence' of clotting after COVID vaccine

THERE is "literally no evidence" showing a direct link between COVID-19 vaccination and clotting but people prone to anaphylaxis may be advised to receive their shots under additional medical supervision, Newcastle-based viral immunologist Nathan Bartlett says.

Most of western Europe has temporarily paused the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure following concerns the vaccine could be linked to blood clots.

But Associate Professor Bartlett, of HMRI and the University of Newcastle, said there was "no data" to show any causal link between vaccination with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine and clotting.

"It does look very much like these are associated events that have happened at a known rate, and certainly the rate in which these clotting events are occurring is no higher than it normally is," he said. "Personally I think there was no need to pause it. Millions of people have now received these vaccines. Safety has been closely monitored."



NO HESITATION: Associate Professor Nathan Bartlett says the COVID-19 vaccines will change the way we live again. Picture: Jonathan Carroll

But he said there was a "slightly higher" risk of anaphylaxis for people who were already susceptible to severe "type 1 hypersen-

sitivity" allergic reactions. "In flu vaccine, anaphylaxis rates are between one and 10 per million," he said. "The Pfizer and AstraZeneca

vaccines are closer to about 100 in a million. These vaccines are stimulating a more robust immune response on vaccination. I think the

recommendations will be that those people will need additional medical supervision - they may need to go to a more specialised site for

their vaccination to ensure they can be appropriately monitored and medical treatment is right on hand. No one has died from this."

GPs pleading for patience

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Dr Seckold said his practice was looking to vaccinate their most high-risk patients as soon as possible, but the process could take "months".

"It has been extremely challenging given the lack of communication from the government to GP practices about the rollout," he said.

"I am unsure how we are expected to vaccinate patients who are not regular patients of the practice. We have thousands of patients on our books, many of whom

are high risk. It will take us months just to vaccinate our own patients."

In a joint statement, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and Australian Medical Association said the rollout of the vaccine was a "huge logistical challenge" constrained by the available supply.

Australia's peak GP bodies said the influx of patients seeking to make bookings for COVID-19 vaccinations was encouraging, but the government must "urgently

clarify" the booking process for patients to help them better understand the process.

"It's clear the government needs to make it easy for patients and general practices alike to manage bookings for COVID-19 vaccinations and be clear about how long patients may have to wait before they can get an appointment," AMA president, Dr Omar Khorshid, said.

He said unlike the flu season, where 15 million doses were already stockpiled, this rollout relied on a weekly

supply of COVID-19 vaccine doses that was capped.

"This means that general practices will have only a modest number of doses available for patients for now," he said. "GPs will be following strict priority criteria to ensure that vaccines are prioritised towards those who need it most."

RACGP president Dr Karen Price called for calm.

"I understand that patients are eager to receive their vaccination and that is positive news; however, I plead

with all people to please be respectful when speaking to receptionists and administrative staff managing this huge volume of calls about vaccines on top of their day-to-day presentations," she said. "They are doing their best in very challenging circumstances. It may be a frustrating experience, but if you are kept on hold for an extended period or told that a booking can't be made yet due to uncertainty about when vaccine supplies will be delivered, my message is

simple - please be patient."

Dr Price advised patients to hold off contacting GP clinics until general practices could achieve greater certainty on how many AstraZeneca vaccines would be delivered and when. "Many practices will already be going through their patient records to identify who is eligible and will reach out to their usual patients to organise an appointment," she said. "You will not miss out."

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