

Worried about getting a COVID-19 vaccine? Ask your doctor these five questions first

Many Australians have been putting off getting their coronavirus vaccination for weeks but a sudden surge in COVID-19 in Victoria has pushed them to rethink their 'wait and see' approach on vaccines.

ACU vaccine expert Roger Lord says the association between the vaccine and risk of developing blood clots afterwards has been made without consideration and examination of an individual's own personal level of risk.

"Any reported cases of blood clotting following administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine has automatically been assumed to be a result of the vaccine rather than a case by case evaluation of risk factors that may have increased the likeliness of blood clots forming in that person," Dr Lord said.

"The medical urgency in the UK and Europe led to limited medical history being taken for each person being vaccinated to assess an individual's risk prior to vaccination. So, when we see reports about blood clots, we automatically assume it is the result of the vaccine rather than something in the person's medical history."

Prior to vaccination, Dr Lord said people should visit their general practitioner to evaluate their personal risk of developing blood clots by asking about:

1. Personal or family history of blood clotting disorders or autoimmune disease
2. Currently prescribed or over the counter medications that may influence clotting. In the elderly this can be several drugs to treat chronic conditions such as blood pressure, cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis
3. The risk of any up-coming or recent surgical procedures and treatments that increase risk of clotting

4. Whether a full blood count is required for platelet numbers and evaluation of clotting times
5. Personal risk of other factors such as smoking, use of oral contraceptives, HRT or use of hormones that stimulate red blood formation.

“Based on this information, a doctor will be able to assess the specific risk for an individual and advise if the AstraZeneca vaccine is suitable for vaccination against COVID-19 or if another COVID-19 vaccine formulation would be more advantageous,” Dr Lord said.

“The bottom line is that if you have concerns, discuss them with their doctor.”

He added that currently there is no data available for the risk versus benefit associated with any of the newly developed COVID-19 vaccines in patients with rheumatic or neuroinflammatory autoimmune diseases.

“Vaccine hesitancy in this group is largely centred on concerns of aggravation of the underlying autoimmune disease. Vaccines available for other conditions have resulted in few adverse events in people with autoimmune disease.”

Dr Lord is available for interview.

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