

UPDATE FROM THE CARIBBEAN PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY ON COVID-19 VACCINES AND VARIANTS

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The Caribbean Public Health Agency is aware that some countries in the European Union have suspended their AstraZeneca vaccination campaign, as a result of reports of rare blood coagulation disorders in people who had received the vaccine. This was done as a precautionary measure while a full investigation is conducted into the reports. At present, it cannot be determined whether there is a link between the vaccine and the disorders.

Adverse reactions that happen following immunisation with any vaccine need to be fully investigated to rule out various factors, for example concomitant illnesses, progression of a disease, and batch assessment, before a final decision is made by the health authorities.

It must be noted that the vaccine being used in the Caribbean is not the same version or batch as the one in Europe.

The World Health Organization's Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) systematically reviews any vaccine safety

signals and concerns related to COVID-19 vaccine safety. This committee is carefully assessing the current reports on the Astra Zeneca vaccine. As soon as WHO has gained a full understanding of these events, the findings and any changes to current recommendations will be immediately communicated to regional and international public health partners which includes CARPHA.

The WHO states that “Vaccination against COVID-19 will not reduce deaths from other causes. Deaths from other causes will continue to occur, including after vaccination, but causally unrelated. As of 9 March, over 268 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since the start of the pandemic, based on data reported to WHO by national governments. No cases of death have been found to have been caused by COVID-19 vaccines to date.^[1]

We want to reassure our Member States that CARPHA’s Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS) applies its reliance procedure to verify vaccines with emergency use authorization granted by stringent regulatory authorities of reference.

CARPHA encourages persons who have been vaccinated with any of the COVID-19 vaccines available in their country, to report adverse events that occur after vaccination to the local health authorities.

Statement on Variants

The appearance of variants is part of the normal cycle of viral infection and replication and should not be considered an unusual process. Because the variants appear more frequently the more subjects become infected, it is essential to maintain all the measures that prevent the occurrence of new infections (use of masks, washing hands, social distancing, avoiding crowds, etc.).

The appearance of new variants does not justify in any way the interruption of the vaccination campaigns against SARS-CoV-2. Cutting the transmission chains through preventive measures and the application of vaccines should be the primary objective at this stage of pandemic. Both the measures mentioned above, and the mass

vaccination of the population will help in the fight against the disease and the eventual end of the pandemic.

CARPHA remains committed to providing technical support and advice and continues to conduct tests for suspected COVID-19 cases for all CARPHA Member States (CMS) routinely as requested. In collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine Campus, CARPHA started conducting whole genome sequencing for CARICOM countries in December 2020. So far CARPHA has detected cases of the UK variant in several member states. No cases of the Brazil or South Africa variant have been detected.

Earlier today, CARPHA met with the Region's Chief Medical Officers to discuss several public health issues, including those related to the fight against COVID-19 disease.

CARPHA continues to work with its regional and international partners and CMS, towards a harmonised regional response. The overarching goal is for all countries to control the pandemic by slowing down the transmission of disease and reducing mortality associated with COVID-19. In this regard, we urge countries to continue ramping up their surveillance capacity to rapidly screen, identify, test, isolate and trace contacts of new cases supported by public health prevention and control measures of social distancing, wearing of masks, and hand hygiene.

We also recognise the important role that the vaccination programmes will play and are quite pleased with the efforts of the countries so far in vaccinating the vulnerable older persons in their population and front-line workers.

More information on CARPHA's Response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found [here](#)

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