

BY EMAIL ONLY

To: Chief Executives of HSC Trusts
Trusts Medical Directors
Trusts Directors of Nursing
GPs
GP Out-of-Hours

www.publichealth.hscni.net

20th April 2021

Dear Colleagues,

COVID-19 vaccine (Astrazeneca) and thromboembolic events with concurrent low platelet counts

I am writing to you following the [CMO letter HSS\(MD\) 28/2021](#) (dated 8th April 2021) to outline the operational procedures which should be followed for any patient reporting symptoms suggestive of a blood clot more than 4 days and within 28 days from receiving a dose of Astrazeneca vaccine. The following symptoms suggest the need for urgent medical investigation:

- new onset of severe headache, which is getting worse and does not respond to simple painkillers
- an unusual headache which seems worse when lying down or bending over, or may be accompanied by blurred vision, nausea and vomiting, difficulty with speech, weakness, drowsiness or seizures
- new unexplained pinprick bruising or bleeding
- shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling
- persistent abdominal pain

Please note that this list of symptoms is not exhaustive. Further details can be found in Appendix 1.

If a patient presents with symptoms suggestive of a blood clot in this time period please take the following actions:

1. Immediately refer patients to their local Emergency Department to have a Full Blood Count and further investigations carried out.
2. Standard [Royal College of Emergency Medicine pathway](#) should be followed and supportive guidance is available through local haematology teams for cases with confirmed thrombocytopenia $<150 \times 10^9/l$ (appendix 1).
3. Report this case via the MHRA Yellow Card System (<https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Bergin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Stephen Bergin
Director of Public Health (Interim)

Appendix 1: Signs and symptoms

While the detailed case review is ongoing, it is important to ensure all health professionals are alert to relevant symptoms which require further clinical review and investigation. Advise patients to seek urgent medical advice if they experience any of the following symptoms more than 4 days and within 28 days of coronavirus vaccination:

- **new onset of severe headache, which is getting worse and does not respond to simple painkillers**
- **an unusual headache which seems worse when lying down or bending over, or may be accompanied by blurred vision, nausea and vomiting, difficulty with speech, weakness, drowsiness or seizures**
- **new unexplained pinprick bruising or bleeding**
- **shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling**
- **persistent abdominal pain**

If you have clinical concern, patients should be urgently referred to hospital and to appropriate specialist services for further assessment, particularly if the symptoms are unexplained and present in combination with thrombocytopenia.

Mild flu-like symptoms, including headache, chills and fever remain one of the most common side effects of any COVID-19 vaccine. These generally appear within a few hours and resolve within a day or two.

Further [guidance for secondary care](#) and [emergency departments](#) are available.

Appendix 2: Resources

- [Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation COVID-19 Vaccine advice](#)
- [Green Book Chapter 14a COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency AstraZeneca Regulatory Approval](#)
- [Northern Ireland COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website](#)