

The Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine is still safe and effective.

With all the recent headlines, some people may be even more confused about vaccines, particularly the Oxford-AstraZeneca (O-AZ) one. Bottom line – even at 54, I would still jump at the chance if offered to me. This vaccine is safer and more effective than you may think, and COVID keeps getting more dangerous and deadly. My risk of dying from COVID may be low but having to live with COVID complications or developing long COVID is terrifying.

The O-AZ vaccine was developed in England by Oxford University who then partnered with AZ to produce the vaccine. The initial trials showed this vaccine to be very safe, but it has continued to be monitored for extremely rare and unusual side effects. Recently, some EU countries found blood clots in about 45 people after giving 5 million the vaccine. Usually, 200 out of every 5 million **unvaccinated** people have blood clots **every week**, so 45 is less than expected, but a few of the vaccine cases were unusual. These were uncommon types of blood clots and occurred more often in younger women suggesting the possibility of an extremely rare medical problem. Canada and a few other countries are avoiding this vaccine for those under 55 while further investigation happens. However, Covid also causes blood clots in about 20 people out of every 100, – along with many other problems.

I know people worry if this vaccine is effective enough, but we now have real world evidence from the United Kingdom. After giving over 17 million doses of AZ vaccine, they have found that that your chances of getting COVID was much lower 4-5 weeks after your first shot, and by 3 months your risk of having even mild COVID had decreased by 75%. Even a single does of this vaccine almost eliminated your risk of being admitted to hospital or dying from COVID. If you get the second dose at least 3 months after the first, rather than after one month, your protection increases to more than 80%. This is one reason Canada is now delaying the second dose.

We are now racing to save lives. The B117 variant is spreading rapidly and hitting younger people even harder. Fortunately, the UK experiences shows us that the O-AZ vaccine works just as well on this variant as the original disease. Delaying the second shot by 4 months means we can protect twice as many people and increase the effectiveness of this vaccine. The UK is now testing to see if using a second shot from a different vaccine could be even more effective. Updated versions of both Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are also being tested, as all the current vaccines are less effective against other concerning variants. If these trials are successful, than perhaps in 4 months, your booster dose may provide even greater protection.

COVID had a massive head start on us, but with the vaccines we may have a chance to catch up. The COVID virus likes to dodge, cheat and change the rules, and information will continue to change as we race to keep up. This will be confusing and stressful for many people, but it is necessary if we are going to win against this virus. The best vaccine is the one that is in your arm and I am ready to roll up my sleeve.

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