

European Countries Suspend Use of AstraZeneca Shots Over Worries About Blood Clots

Millions of people have received the vaccine without safety problems, and there is no evidence of any causal link between the vaccine and blood clots.

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Health authorities in three European countries on Thursday suspended use of AstraZeneca's vaccine because of concerns that it might increase the risk of blood clots, but emphasized that they were taking action as a precaution and that there is no evidence of any causal link.

Denmark acted after a 60-year-old woman who received a shot died after developing a blood clot. Several other European countries had recently stopped using doses from the same batch of the vaccine after some reports of severe blood clots, and European drug regulators are investigating.

In the flurry of suspensions on Thursday, Norway and Iceland followed Denmark's lead. Italy and Romania also paused shots, but only from a different batch of the vaccine than the one that had raised concerns elsewhere.

Public health experts expect medical conditions to turn up by chance in some people after they get any vaccine, just by chance. In the vast majority of cases such illnesses have nothing to do with the shots. Most other countries where the vaccine has been given to many millions of people have not reported similar red flags.

The safety scare is a setback for AstraZeneca's vaccine, which has already struggled with a perception that it is a less desirable shot because it had a lower overall efficacy rate in clinical trials than some others. There is, however, extensive data showing that the vaccine is safe and effective, and especially good at preventing severe illness and death. And in many places across the world, it is the only shot available.

As of Wednesday, 30 cases of obstructive blood clots had been reported among nearly five million people vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine in the European Union and three other European countries — a rate no higher than in the general population, the European

Medicines Agency said. The agency, Europe's main drug regulator, said that the vaccine's benefits outweigh any risks.