

AstraZeneca COVID vaccine recommended for seniors in Canada

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A scientific committee advising the Canadian government on COVID-19 vaccines on Tuesday broadened its recommendation for the use of AstraZeneca jabs to include people aged 65 and over.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization said there was now "real-world evidence" of the vaccine's effectiveness in seniors, reversing its earlier position that not enough people in this age group had been included in [clinical trials](#) to make a determination.

The NACI, which had earlier this month urged giving AstraZeneca shots only to people 18 to 64 years old, cited data from three recent British studies that support its new recommendation.

"This evidence demonstrates that the vaccine is safe and effective in [older adults](#), particularly against severe COVID-19 disease and hospitalization," it said.

The revised recommendation comes after more than a dozen countries, including France, Italy and Germany suspended AstraZeneca's COVID-19 shots over fears of blood clots and other possible side effects.

Austria on March 8 was the first to suspend a batch of the vaccine following the death of a 49-year-old nurse from "severe bleeding disorders" days after receiving it.

"At this time, Health Canada is following these events but considers that given the risks associated with COVID 19... it is preferable to continue to be vaccinated with the vaccines available in Canada, including the AstraZeneca vaccine," Marc Berthiaume, director of the agency's medical science bureau, told a news conference.

"Our recommendation is not related to what is happening in Europe," commented Caroline Quach, chair of the NACI's infectious disease working group.

The NACI, however, noted that due to limited vaccine supplies, people

most at risk of serious illness and death should be given priority access to mRNA vaccines, such as those made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

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