

Australia offers all adults AstraZeneca to speed up rollout

June 29 2021, by Rod McGuirk



New South Wales Minister for Agriculture Adam Marshall speaks to the media during a visit to the Sydney Royal Easter show in Sydney on April 6, 2021. Marshall, who had not had a dose of vaccine, said he was the only one among four government colleagues who dined together at a Sydney pizza restaurant on June 21, 2021 to become infected. Australia is offering AstraZeneca to all adults in a bid to rapidly ramp up sluggish vaccination rates as more of the country on Tuesday locked down against spreading COVID-19 clusters of the delta variant. Credit: Bianca de Marchi/AAP Image via AP

Australia is offering AstraZeneca to all adults in a bid to rapidly ramp up sluggish vaccination rates as more of the country on Tuesday locked down against the spread of COVID-19.

The government late Monday agreed to indemnify doctors who administer the AstraZeneca vaccine that has been blamed for at least two fatalities from a rare blood clot complication in Australia since April.

That exceeds the single death from COVID-19 in Australia this year, and vaccine hesitancy has increased with only 5% of the population fully inoculated.

Pfizer has been the recommended vaccine for people younger than 60 since a 52-year-old woman died in May of blood clots in the brain blamed on AstraZeneca.

But supply of Pfizer, the only alternative to Australian-manufactured AstraZeneca, cannot keep up with demand.

"There's a preference for Pfizer until the age of 60. That's a preference," Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly said on Tuesday.

"It's a discussion for doctors to have with their own patients and work through their own risk and benefit in relation to that," Kelly added.

The Queensland state capital Brisbane and surrounding cities will be in lockdown for three days from late Tuesday after the government reported two new COVID-19 infections.



In this Feb. 11, 2021, file photo, a health worker prepares a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine to be administered at a vaccination center set up in Fiumicino, near Rome's international airport. Australia is offering AstraZeneca to all adults in a bid to rapidly ramp up sluggish vaccination rates as more of the country on Tuesday, June 29, 2021 locked down against spreading COVID-19 clusters of the delta variant. Credit: AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File

Sydney reported 19 new infections in that east coast city, Perth reported two new cases on the [west coast](#) and Darwin reported two new cases on the north coast. Those three cities and their surrounds are already in lockdown.

Australia has been relatively successful in containing clusters throughout the pandemic, registering fewer than 31,000 cases and 910 deaths within

a population of 26 million. But the new clusters of a variant thought to be more contagious have highlighted the nation's vulnerability through a slow vaccine rollout.

AstraZeneca was supposed to be the mainstay of Australia's vaccination rollout free of the uncertainties of international supply chains. It was recommended for all adults until a 48-year-old woman died of blood clots in April four days after her first jab. AstraZeneca was then said to be a safe option for adults aged over 50 until the 52-year-old died.

Some epidemiologists argue the government should speed up the rollout by reducing the gap between AstraZeneca jabs from 12 to eight weeks. But some Australians are now refusing to take a second shot because of the evolving perception of the blood clotting risk.

The New South Wales state government is highlighting vaccines' apparent successes in the current Sydney cluster.

Twenty-four people who attended a birthday party on June 19 became infected with the delta variant. None had been vaccinated. But six fully vaccinated health workers and an aged care worker who had received the first of two doses attended the house party and were not infected.

"The early and strong indications from that party ... are, if you're vaccinated, you are much more likely to not be infected with COVID-19," Health Minister Brad Hazzard said on Monday.

State Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall said he was the only one among four government colleagues who dined together at a Sydney pizza restaurant on June 21 to become infected. An infected person had been at the restaurant earlier.

Marshall revealed he was the only one among the four who had not had a

dose of vaccine because, at age 36, he was not eligible.

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