



COVID-19 VACCINE FOR POLIO SURVIVORS

Position Paper

Polio Australia represents the thousands of people living in Australia who have survived an onset of poliovirus infection and are now living with its effects. Many have lived with disability since the acute infection, while others go on to develop disability later due to the Late Effects of Polio.

Susceptibility to serious illness from COVID-19

There is no evidence to suggest that a history of polio on its own will render a person more susceptible to developing serious illness from COVID-19. However, many polio survivors in Australia are in a higher-risk category for COVID-19 due to older age.¹ Additionally, the presence of chronic lung disease puts many people at a higher risk of serious illness.² While some polio survivors have chronic respiratory failure or dysfunction that relates to hypoventilation rather than lung damage, it could be reasonably assumed that they may also be at a higher risk of serious illness.

COVID-19 vaccination for people with a history of polio

The following is general information only, and should not be taken as individual advice. For all individual medical or health concerns related to vaccination for COVID-19, each person should seek their own medical advice.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) lists contraindications for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. These include avoiding a second dose of vaccine if the person experiences anaphylaxis following the first dose, and not receiving any vaccine if the person has previously had an anaphylactic reaction to component ingredients of the vaccine.³

ATAGI also advises precaution for people with a number of other conditions, including: non-anaphylactic allergic reactions to the vaccine or its components; prior history of anaphylaxis to previous vaccines and/or drugs with ingredients

¹Australian Government Department of Health, 2021. Advice for people at risk of coronavirus (COVID-19). <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

² ibid

³ Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), 2021. Clinical guidance of use of COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2021 (v2.0). https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/covid-19-vaccination-atagi-clinical-guidance-on-covid-19-vaccine-in-australia-in-2021_0.pdf

such as PEG or polysorbate 80; mast cell activation disorder; current febrile illness (defer vaccine); and bleeding disorders.⁴

As at 27 May 2021, Polio Australia has not found or received any information to suggest an increased risk of adverse effects from COVID-19 vaccination in those with a history of polio.

Adverse effects related to COVID-19 vaccination

According to the Australian Government Department of Health, common side-effects of COVID-19 vaccine include: injection site pain; fatigue; headache; muscle pain; and fever.⁵

Serious side-effects, which include Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome, are rare. No specific risk factors have been confirmed, although the Pfizer vaccine is the preferred option for people with a history of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis or heparin-induced thrombocytopenia.⁶

Some people with limited mobility may be at higher risk of general clotting issues. However, there does not appear to be an increased risk of developing vaccine-related clotting disorders for those with reduced mobility.⁷

For those taking anticoagulant medication, the risk of clotting disorders relating to the COVID-19 vaccine may be reduced.⁸

Summary

At the time of writing (May 2021), Polio Australia has not found or received any evidence to suggest an increased risk of adverse outcomes from COVID-19 vaccination for people with a history of polio.

All individuals should seek advice from their own general practitioners and medical specialists in relation to their particular history, current post-polio symptoms, co-morbidities and concerns.

Thanks to Professor Robert Booy for reviewing the contents of this paper. Professor Booy is a board member and past chair of the [Immunisation Coalition](#), and is a member of Polio Australia's [Clinical Advisory Group](#).

⁴ Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), 2021. Clinical guidance of use of COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2021 (v2.0). https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/covid-19-vaccination-atagi-clinical-guidance-on-covid-19-vaccine-in-australia-in-2021_0.pdf

⁵ Australian Government Department of Health, 2021. About the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine#risks-of-vaccination>.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Crawford, N, 2021. VACSIG Webinar: COVID-19 Vaccines and Rare Side Effects.

⁸ VACSIG Webinar Panel, 2021. VACSIG Webinar: COVID-19 Vaccines and Rare Side Effects.