



When and how to refer COVID-19 vaccine patients to VicSIS

Factsheet for primary care providers Version 2.

OFFICIAL

Key points

- Only medical practitioners may refer patients to VicSIS.
- There are a limited number of reasons why people should receive an alternative vaccine.
- VicSIS clinics support safe administration of COVID-19 vaccines. They do not accept referrals for alternate vaccine (for example Pfizer vaccine).
- VicSIS reviews are for people who are at higher risk of severe adverse events to a COVID-19 vaccine or those who have had an adverse event following receipt of COVID-19 vaccine.
- VicSIS will only review patients with allergies to COVID-19 vaccines or their ingredients (i.e. referrals for allergies to food, multiple drugs, latex etc. will be declined).
- VicSIS is experiencing a high volume of referrals at this time and there may be significant delays in triaging referrals.
- Submitting referrals to VicSIS for patients that do not meet criteria delays patients who can be vaccinated safely in the community from doing so. It also causes delays for other patients who require VicSIS support.
- Abuse of healthcare workers and VicSIS clinic staff will not be tolerated.

Delivering COVID-19 vaccines safely

The [Victorian Specialist Immunisation Services \(VicSIS\)](#) support vaccine providers to safely administer COVID-19 vaccines. They provide specialised advice for people who are at higher risk of adverse events following vaccination – this ensures these people receive a COVID-19 vaccine as safely as possible. VicSIS also advises on patients who have had an adverse event after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

When to refer patients to VicSIS

1. Patient experienced a significant adverse event following immunisation (AEFI) to a COVID-19 vaccine

Anyone who has experienced a significant adverse event following a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine should first have their adverse event reported to [SAEFVIC](#).

Examples of significant AEFI includes:

- Confirmed [thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome \(TTS\)](#)
- Immediate (within 4 hours) and generalised symptoms of a possible allergic reaction (e.g. hives) to a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Guillain Barre Syndrome

Further information can be found in the Clinician referral form and guide to VicSIS can be found [here](#).

2. At higher risk of an AEFI due to a history of any of the below conditions

- Cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT), idiopathic splanchic (mesenteric, portal and splenic) venous thrombosis, anti-phospholipid syndrome (with thrombosis and/or miscarriage) or thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS).
- Previous capillary leak syndrome

Patients with a history of the above conditions only need to be referred to VicSIS if they would normally be offered AstraZeneca vaccine as part of government eligibility.

3. Allergies to COVID-19 vaccine components

- Anaphylaxis or generalised allergic reaction (without anaphylaxis) to any component of the COVID-19 vaccine to be administered (e.g. PEG (e.g. Movicol) in the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine).
- A history of PEG or polysorbate related reactions and/or a history of multiple allergic reactions to other medications containing PEG or polysorbate. (Please check the ingredients of the patient's current/previously tolerated medications as they may contain PEG/polysorbate).
- A history of confirmed mastocytosis with recurrent anaphylaxis that requires treatment.

Individuals with a past history of any of the cardiac conditions listed in the [ATAGI Guidance](#) on Myocarditis and Pericarditis (please note these individuals can also be seen by their treating cardiologist).

More information on allergies can be found at the Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre (MVEC) [COVID-19 vaccine FAQs](#).

When you shouldn't refer patients to VicSIS

You should not refer patients to VicSIS if they prefer a particular COVID-19 vaccine brand.

Getting vaccinated is a choice. If people do not want to receive a particular brand of COVID-19 vaccine you are encouraged to:

- Listen to their concerns.
- Answer their questions by directing them to reliable sources of information.
- Find out more information about TTS to support you to have this conversation with patients.

Tell patients that getting vaccinated is voluntary. The vaccine brand type provided is based on specialist advice set by Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

How to refer eligible patients to VicSIS

Only medical practitioners may refer patients to VicSIS – patients cannot self-refer.

Referrals can be made by emailing a completed VicSIS Clinic Referral Form (found [here](#)) through to the patient's closest VicSIS clinic site or where they receive regular care. A patient can only be referred to a **single** VicSIS clinic.

VicSIS clinics available in Victoria

VicSIS Clinic	Referral email
Alfred Hospital	specialistimmunisationservice@alfred.org.au
Austin Hospital (includes specialist allergy clinic)	COVIDvaccineallergy@austin.org.au
Barwon Health	VicSIS@barwonhealth.org.au
Monash Health (includes specialist allergy clinic)	vicsis@monashhealth.org
Northern Hospital	SpecialImmunisationService@nh.org.au
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre	SpecialistImmunisationService@petermac.org
Royal Children's Hospital*	clinics.saefvic@mcri.edu.au
Royal Melbourne Hospital	specialistimmunisationservice@mh.org.au
Sunshine Hospital	COVIDvaccinationSIS@wh.org.au

*The Royal Children's Hospital is not a funded VicSIS site. However, it's recognised as an established vaccine safety clinic for paediatric patients. Referrals can be made to the Royal Children's Hospital by sending a referral to clinics.saefvic@mcri.edu.au.

For an updated list of clinics please visit the website linked [here](#)

Information about COVID-19 brands

Patients may have concerns over the blood clotting (thrombosis) with low blood platelet count (thrombocytopenia), also known as thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS). However, TTS is very rare with a different mechanism to most other causes of thrombosis and/or thrombocytopenia. Among cases, there are no known markers for increased risk for TTS.

People who have the following conditions can receive AstraZeneca vaccine:

- history of blood clots in typical sites – including deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE)
- increased clotting tendency that is not immune mediated – including Factor V Leiden, or other non-immune thrombophilic disorders
- family history of blood clots
- history of ischaemic heart disease or stroke
- current or past thrombocytopenia (low platelet count)
- those receiving anticoagulation therapy

other types of allergies such as to food, latex or venom

latest ATAGI guidelines section [When to refer patients to VicSIS](#).

The above information is based on the [joint statement from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation \(ATAGI\) and the Thrombosis and Haemostasis society of Australia and New Zealand \(THANZ\) on Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome \(TTS\) and the use of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca](#).

What happens after a referral

Once you submit a referral for your patient to VicSIS it can take 4-6 weeks for a response. Please advise patients of this timeline to manage expectations. Thank you for your patience.

More information and resources

- [MVEC: SAEFVIC](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccines and allergy](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 FAQs: allergies, side effects and safety](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccine adverse events](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccines in people with immunocompromise](#)
- [MVEC: Immunisation recommendations for the older population](#)
- The [VicSIS page on the MVEC website](#) has the following documents:
 - VicSIS referral form
 - Clinician referral guide to VicSIS
 - Guidance for differentiating anaphylaxis and acute stress response for vaccine providers
 - Clinicians guide to COVID-19 vaccination for patients with cancer

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 651 160, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email COVIDVaccination@health.vic.gov.au <COVIDVaccination@health.vic.gov.au>.

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