

Denmark prolongs suspension of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine

25 March 2021, by Jan M. Olsen



Soeren Brostroem, director of the National Board of Health, left and Tanja Erichsen, from the Danish Medicines Agency take part in a press briefing regarding the status of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, in Copenhagen, Thursday, March 25, 2021. Danish officials have decided to extend their suspension of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine by three weeks while they continue evaluating the vaccine's potential link with blood clots. Denmark first paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure on March 11. (Mads Claus Rasmussen/Ritzau Scanpix via AP)

Danish officials decided Thursday to prolong their suspension of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine by three weeks while they continue evaluating a potential link with blood clots even though European Union regulators who looked into the issue have cleared the vaccine for use.

Denmark's decision "was made on the basis of presumed side effects," Tanja Erichsen, acting director of pharmacovigilance at the Danish Medicines Agency, said during a news conference.

"It can't be ruled out that there is a connection between the [vaccine](#) and the very rare blood clot cases," she said.

Denmark paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure on March 11 after reports that a 60-year-old woman died with [blood clots](#) in several parts of her body a week after she received the vaccine, according to [health officials](#).

The death of a second person in Denmark who died after getting the AstraZeneca vaccine was reported. Danish health authorities said they have no evidence the vaccine was responsible for either death.

"I would like to emphasize that I am not talking about ordinary blood clots," Erichsen said. "It is not about blood clots in the arms, legs and lungs."

The pause will last at least until April 18. Norway and Sweden also suspended the AstraZeneca vaccine. Most European countries that had put the vaccine on hold resumed administering it after the European Medicines Agency said last week that it was safe..



Tanja Erichsen, from the Danish Medicines Agency speaks during a press briefing about the status of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine , n Copenhagen, Thursday, March 25, 2021. Danish officials have decided to extend their suspension of the AstraZeneca COVID-19

vaccine by three weeks while they continue evaluating the vaccine's potential link with blood clots. Denmark first paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure on March 11. (Mads Claus Rasmussen/Ritzau Scanpix via AP)

Sweden's Public Health Agency said Thursday it would resume giving AstraZeneca jabs to people over age 65 but it was recommending continuing to keep them on hold for other age groups while awaiting additional data. Sweden suspended administering the AstraZeneca vaccine on March 16.

"The vaccine is very useful for the elderly as many become seriously ill with COVID-19 every day," the Swedish agency's director, Johan Carlson, said in a statement. "At the same time, we haven't seen a risk of these rare and serious side effects in the elderly. That is the reason why we are canceling the break for people over the age of 65."

Health officials in neighboring Finland said late Wednesday that the country would resume using the AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday after a pause of over a week, but only would administer it to people over 65.

Use of the AstraZeneca vaccine was suspended in Finland last Friday after brain blood clots were diagnosed in two individuals who had received the jab.

Soeren Brostroem, director of the National Board of Health, foreground and Tanja Erichsen, from the Danish Medicines Agency arrive for a press briefing regarding the status of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, in Copenhagen, Thursday, March 25, 2021. Danish officials have decided to extend their suspension of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine by three weeks while they continue evaluating the vaccine's potential link with blood clots. Denmark first paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a precautionary measure on March 11. (Mads Claus Rasmussen/Ritzau Scanpix via AP)

According to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, more than 1 million doses of various vaccines have been administered in Denmark, which has a population of nearly 6 million. The vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna represent the bulk of the jabs given in the Scandinavian country, and about 150,000 people in Denmark have gotten a shot of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

"Many may wonder whether we are overcautious. To that I will say, 'You can say that' We have added extra precautionary principles," Danish Health Authority Director General Soeren Brostroem said.

Brostroem said that when and if Denmark resumes using the AstraZeneca vaccine, people will be given the option of declining the vaccine from the Anglo-Swedish drug maker.

"You can wait and get another one," he said. Denmark also uses vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna.





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The European Medicines Agency has said the vaccine's benefits continue to outweigh its risks and the vaccine can continue to be administered while a closer evaluation of the blood clot cases continues.

"Right now, we believe that our basis for making a final decision on the further use of the COVID-19 vaccine by AstraZeneca is too uncertain," Brostroem said. "Many studies have been launched, but we do not yet have any conclusions. That is why we have decided to extend the break."

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