

No proof COVID vaccines can trigger Guillain-Barré syndrome

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(HealthDay)—Two people in the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine trial developed Guillain-Barré syndrome, but it's highly doubtful the vaccine is to blame, according to a just-published case study.

Although both people were in the same trial, one was given the [vaccine](#) and the other was given a placebo of saline solution.

"That strengthens the possibility that the case in our report may have been a coincidence," said study author Dr. Anthony Amato, a neurologist at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a rare condition in which the immune system attacks nerve cells. Symptoms begin with weakness in the hands and feet and can progress to paralysis.

Though the condition can be life-threatening, most people recover.

The exact cause of Guillain-Barré isn't known, but it can occur after gastrointestinal or respiratory infections. Each year, it affects up to 20 people in a million. In very rare cases, it happens after a vaccination.

Amato said COVID-19 vaccines now being administered in the United States have been shown to be safe and effective at reducing risk of severe illness and death and are saving lives.

"With approximately one billion people worldwide expected to be vaccinated against COVID-19, we anticipate there could be thousands of cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome that will occur around the time of the vaccination only by coincidence," he said.

The [case study](#), published online April 6 in the journal *Neurology*, focuses on a healthy 60-year-old woman who received the vaccine in December 2020. Ten days later, she developed aches in her back and legs, and eventually was unable to move them.

The woman was treated with immunoglobulin, which provides antibodies that the body is not making on its own. She began rehab 10 days after admission to the hospital and is recovering, the researchers said in a news release from the American Academy of Neurology.

As nations push to vaccinate people against COVID-19, Amato said it is vital to monitor closely for possible side effects and conduct large studies to determine if the risk of Guillain-Barré [syndrome](#) is similar to or different from the small risk associated with other vaccines, such as the flu shot.

He said such monitoring would help avoid blaming the COVID-19 vaccine for effects that are not scientifically linked to it.

"Based on experience with other vaccination initiatives and the data in the adverse monitoring systems of the COVID-19 vaccines gathered so far, we are certain that the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks of COVID-19 infection," Amato said.

More information: To learn more about Guillain-Barré syndrome and vaccination, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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