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J&J vaccine and blood clots: What you need to know

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On Tuesday, federal health agencies in the United States called for a temporary halt in the use of Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine [over concerns that the vaccine may be linked to a rare disorder involving blood clots](#).

Six vaccine recipients — all women between the ages of 18 and 48 — developed the disorder within about two weeks of vaccination. One woman died and a second woman has been hospitalized in critical condition.

Nearly every state, as well as CVS and Walgreens, [have altered use of the shot](#).

The following is a preview of our Coronavirus Briefing newsletter, an informed guide to the pandemic. [Sign up here to get this newsletter in your inbox](#).

Nearly seven million people in the United States have received Johnson & Johnson shots so far. Mary Altaffer/Associated Press

Carl Zimmer, a New York Times science reporter, answers questions about where things stand.

What is the link between the vaccines and the blood clots?

It's not clear how much the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is involved in these cases — if at all. The reason that the federal agencies are recommending a pause is that all six of these people got a particular kind of blood clot, and that's unusual. But you have to bear in mind that every day, thousands of people get blood clots for lots of different reasons. So they have to do more research to figure out if the vaccines are actually causing these very rare blood clots. And if so, why is it that only six people that we know of out of almost seven million people got it?

In the world of vaccines, are figures like that — six out of seven million — unusual?

It's just too soon to say that this vaccine raises your risk, even slightly, of blood clots. If there is a risk, it's so incredibly small it's almost impossible for us to imagine. To give you a little context, the risk of getting struck by lightning in a given year is one in 500,000. So people should be careful about getting hit by lightning, but we don't go outside thinking, "Today is the day I'm going to die of lightning strikes."

How should we understand the pause?

The Food and Drug Administration explained today that they are pausing this vaccine out of an abundance of caution so that they can spend some time understanding what is going on. And they foresee that it won't take more than a few days to finish the investigation.

That said, people don't normally pay really, really close attention to vaccine trials and vaccine rollout. But right now the whole world is paying very close attention to these vaccines. So the idea of a pause might seem alarming and unprecedented, but in fact, pauses happen all the time, both in trials and in rollouts of medical products.

What should people who have gotten the Johnson & Johnson vaccine do?

They should bear in mind that we don't know yet if the vaccines are associated with this rare clot. If they are associated with the clot, the odds are incredibly small that they will experience it.

And there are things you can do to be careful. Two or three weeks after the vaccine, if you start experiencing severe headaches or leg pains, you should let your doctor know right away. Or go to the E.R. if you're really feeling terrible and let them know that you've gotten the shot. But you don't need to worry about having a headache and flulike symptoms in the first few days after getting the shot. Lots of people get that — it's really common and it's completely harmless.

More on Johnson & Johnson:

- The pharmaceutical company said it would [delay the rollout of its vaccine in Europe](#).
- Jeffrey Zients, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator, said the pause “

country already has enough vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna to inoculate almost all American adults.

- What is a blood clot? Does this risk mainly affect women? Science reporters at The Times [answered common questions](#) on blood clots and vaccines.