

Vaccine Benefits Outweigh the Risks

Out of an abundance of caution, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently recommended a pause in the use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, after a handful of patients suffered from a rare clotting condition weeks after receiving the shot.

A CDC panel is currently assessing the vaccine's risks and will soon make a decision whether or not to reinstate the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The group meets again Friday, April 23 and a recommendation is expected soon after.

According to Dr. Ravi Hasanadka, a vascular surgeon at OSF HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, Illinois, the temporary pause is a way to gather information on the vaccine's possible role in the condition, called Cerebral Venous Sinus Thrombosis (CVST), and how to diagnose and treat it. He says while CVST is a concerning diagnosis and symptoms should be taken seriously, it is incredibly rare.

"When you have a clot in that cerebral venous sinus, or the vein that drains the brain, you have stroke symptoms, from bleeding in the brain," says Dr. Hasanadka. "There can be headaches, also confusion. So those are the symptoms they are saying if you have 2-3 weeks after you receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine you should contact your doctor or get emergency care."

"The thing really is, it's more of a cautionary step to see how we should diagnose it and treat it for when that rare condition occurs, but the benefits of being vaccinated far outweigh the risks of having these clotting complications."

As research continues about the connection between CVST and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, Dr. Hasanadka says one thing is certain. Getting a COVID-19 infection is proven to dramatically increase a patient's risk for blood clots.

"One of the first tests they can do on you if they suspect you of a clot is called a D-dimer test, which is a product made when clots form. Those numbers in COVID patients, even without forming a clot, is insanely high. They are the highest D-dimers you will see as a doctor," explains Dr. Hasanadka. "So the belief is that people with COVID infection are forming tiny clots and they are just showering their bodies with them constantly. So there's higher incidents of pulmonary embolism, which is clot in the lungs, as well as deep venous thrombosis, clot in the leg veins or arm veins."

Dr. Hasanadka maintains that vaccinations against COVID-19 are our best shot to help end the pandemic, and their value far outweighs the minute risks of clotting side effects.

Currently anyone age 16 and older is eligible to receive the vaccine. For those eligible, OSF HealthCare has a new online self-scheduling tool for COVID-19 vaccination at osfhealthcare.org/vaccine. For the latest information about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit the OSF HealthCare [website](#).