



Austria investigating AstraZeneca vaccine as 'precautionary measure' following deaths

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March 8th 2021

Austrian authorities have suspended inoculations with a batch of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine as a “precautionary measure” while they investigate the death of one person and the illness of another after they received shots.

“It's important to remember that correlation is not the same thing as causation. So just because a death occurred on the same day a person received a vaccination does not mean there's any connection,” said Dr. Jeffrey Singer of the CATO Institute to The National Desk’s Jan Jeffcoat. “We've yet to confirm a single death related to the AstraZeneca vaccine.”

The AstraZeneca vaccine is currently in use in 60 countries, but has yet to submit an application for approval to the Food and Drug Administration.

“The FDA is going to want to see what comes from the investigation,” said Dr. Singer. “It makes sense for Austria to want to look into it and suspend it, but just because something happened on the same day doesn't mean there's a connection.”

Another example of correlation not meaning causation, according to Dr. Singer? A recent study by the CDC that says mask mandates and prohibiting on-premise dining helps limit COVID-19 exposure.

“This CDC study actually mentioned that it had a lot of limitations, it didn't control for any other factors that mitigate COVID spread and didn't control for compliance,” said Dr. Singer. “I think in general, allowing people at this point - a year later with what we know, with vaccines around, with therapeutics, with better ways of treating COVID - allowing people more flexibility to use their best informed judgment I think is more likely to actually get compliance.”

Even as states roll back mask mandates, Dr. Singer says we'll continue to see people masking up.

“Lifting a mask mandate is not the same thing as ordering people to take their masks off, it just means that people will not be penalized for not wearing a mask,” said Dr. Singer. “Restaurants and stores, they want business, and they're going to want to do the things that are going to attract people and make people feel safe.”

As vaccine development continues, Ridgeback Biotherapeutics and Merck have developed an experimental drug meant to reduce COVID infections.

“It’s an antiviral,” said Dr. Singer. “It looks like it stops the virus from reproducing when it enters the host cell. We only have very limited information on it so far. It would be great if it works, but you know we had high hopes for remdesivir which is also an antiviral and while it helps some, it doesn't help nearly as much as we hoped it would.”