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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Doorstop Media Conference, Fremantle WA, 13:45 WST, 29 June 2021

**Subject:** Changes to COVID-19 vaccine rollout

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**Dr OMAR KHORSHID:**

Yesterday’s announcement by the Prime Minister regarding the vaccine program after National Cabinet, indicates a really significant change in the vaccine program. It means that Australians under the age of 40, anyone over the age of 18, will be potentially able to access the AstraZeneca vaccine. The advice, though, from the AMA, and from doctors, is the same. The experts have said that the preferred vaccine under the age of 60 is the Pfizer vaccine and that is still the health advice. However, the PM’s announcement does mean that for those who really want their vaccine now or who think that they are happy to take the risks associated with AZ, that’s actually an option now for all Australians.

We’ve heard today from the Health Minister that there’ll be an item number to allow GPs to have those conversations with younger Australians and that means that we could see people getting the AZ vaccine fairly soon. I do ask though for patience, this is brand new news for GPs. We understand many, many people have been calling GP practices today and they are just not ready yet. They are still waiting for advice from the Government. So please give GPs a bit of time to get used to this really big change.

The other thing that’s been announced is a change to the medical indemnity arrangements around the vaccine program. With the government extending support to GPs and to nurses who are doing vaccinations and telling them that they are covered by the Government if there are any unforeseen circumstances that lead to people making a claim against the vaccine. So that is also good news for the vaccine program.

**JOURNALIST:** Do you endorse the PM’s announcement to allow access to AZ for young people?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** We, like the PM, recognize that there has been a desire in the community for access to AZ. People have been saying ‘I want it, I’m happy to make that call’. So, whilst the AMA does support ATAGI’s advice and says you should get Pfizer, this change is something that will free the vaccine up. It is an approved vaccine for anybody over the age of 18 and Australians in conjunction with their GPs can make that decision.

**JOURNALIST:** How much of a risk is the decision? Are they risking their lives? What are we talking about?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** The risk here is the TTS syndrome which has been associated with a very low risk of immune related clotting and extremely rare incidence of death at around 1 per 2 million doses here in Australia. So we’re talking tiny tiny risks. But of course if you’re the unlucky one that it happens to you, it is a significant event. Now the experts have weighed up this evidence, they’ve suggested that the Pfizer is a better vaccine for everybody under 60. But for Australians who want to make their own decision, that is now available through consultation with their GP.

**JOURNALIST:** Were you surprised about the PM making this unilateral decision?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** This decision out of the National Cabinet by the PM was a surprise to the AMA, it's a surprise to doctors. And we, like we have throughout the pandemic, we're reacting quickly, finding out all the information we need to. And I'm sure GPs will be getting themselves set up to be able to offer the vaccine to younger Australians as soon as possible.

**JOURNALIST:** Has there been an influx? Is that the word from GPs that they're struggling to keep up?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** We've certainly heard from GPs today that they are getting lots of calls from patients who are interested in accessing the vaccine, and of course they haven't yet had any parameters around which to do that. So, GP practices may be a little busy today on the phones, so please everyone just be patient. Give the GPs a chance to get ready for this new change. Hopefully, maybe even by as early as next week, we'll be ready to roll AZ out to those who are interested under the age of 60.

**JOURNALIST:** Just to clarify, you recommend people stick to the ATAGI advice, that AZ should only be given to those over 60, is that correct?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** The advice from the experts was that the preferred vaccine for those under the age of 60 is the Pfizer vaccine. And that's by weighing up the risks and the benefits in the Australian context. That means in a small outbreak. Now, of course, if we had a really big outbreak, then the risk benefit changes and AZ becomes an excellent vaccine for everybody. That's where the disagreement, that's where the confusion has been around this vaccine. It is safe, it is effective. But for those under 60, there is a better vaccine and that is Pfizer.

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