

Question on Notice

No. 1386

Asked on 28 October 2021

MR S ANDREW ASKED THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON Y D'ATH)—

QUESTION

With reference to the parent organism of the AstraZeneca Vaccine GMO being the chimpanzee adenovirus isolate Y25 (ChAd Y25)—

Will the Minister (a) advise what steps have been taken to ensure that this GMO, and any others used in gene-based medicines, are not being released into the environment through the state's wastewater and sewerage system and (b) provide details of any cases in Queensland, where this may in fact have already happened?

ANSWER

The COVID-19 vaccine is the best way to protect against severe COVID-19 disease and is a critical step in combatting the virus.

All COVID-19 vaccines used in Australia, including the Vaxzevria COVID-19 vaccine formally referred to as AstraZeneca, must be approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA assesses the safety, quality and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines before they are registered and has deemed the AstraZeneca vaccine as safe and effective for use in Australia.

I am advised the AstraZeneca vaccine uses a chimpanzee adenovirus vaccine vector known as ChAdOx1 which is a harmless, weakened adenovirus that usually causes the common cold in chimpanzees. The specific strain used in this vaccine has had certain genes modified which render the virus unable to multiply.

The vaccine has also undergone an assessment by the Commonwealth Department of Health Office of the Gene Technology Regulator which concluded that risks to the health and safety of both individuals and the environment from ChAdOx1 are negligible, both in the short and long term, and no specific risk treatment measures are required.

I am further advised that, given this conclusion, Queensland Health does not monitor for the presence of ChAdOx1 in wastewater. However, Queensland Health has implemented a wastewater surveillance program to monitor for the presence of SARS-Cov-2.