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Canada orders H1N1 vaccine for pregnant women; Unadjuvanted doses also available for children under three

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Canada has ordered 1.8 million doses of unadjuvanted swine flu vaccine for pregnant women and children under the age of three, Canada's chief public health officer said Friday.

Adjuvants are substances added to vaccines to boost a person's immune response to the shots. While the adjuvant to be used in Canada's H1N1 vaccine -- an oil-in-water emulsion -- is similar to one that has been used in Europe with seasonal flu shots and other vaccines, Dr. David Butler-Jones said there's not yet enough clinical data on adjuvanted vaccines in pregnant women and children under three.

Those groups will have the option of using an unadjuvanted vaccine, he said.

It's not clear whether that would mean one dose, or two. "But we want to keep our options open." Confusion and uneasiness threaten to undermine the federal government's push to get as many people inoculated against swine flu as quickly as possible. This week saw media reports of studies out of Canada suggesting that getting the seasonal flu shot makes people more susceptible to H1N1 -- unpublished data that influenced Ontario's decision to delay its seasonal flu shots. The shots will be made available to people aged 65 and over, and residents of long-term care homes in October, but the rest of the population won't be offered the shots until after an H1N1 vaccination program.

Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan announced a similar flu shot rollout on Friday.

Regular seasonal flu leads to tens of thousands of hospitalizations, and between 2,000 and 8,000 deaths, every year in Canada.

Officials are reviewing the Canadian studies, but similar studies in other countries don't support a possible link.

"It would be very unusual for a vaccine to actually cause this effect," Butler-Jones said. It's not known why the studies are finding different results, he said, adding, "no results can be considered conclusive until the peer review processes are complete." In the last week, 15 Canadians have been hospitalized with H1N1; three have been admitted to intensive care.

As of Sept. 24, 78 H1N1-related deaths have been reported in Canada.