

World-first H1N1 vaccine trial underway

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A vaccine for the deadly swine flu could be available within weeks as Australia, which has already recorded more than 40 deaths, begins world-first human trials.

Australian bio-pharmaceutical company CSL, the makers of the vaccine, believe it will protect against the H1N1 virus.

Some 240 adults will be injected with the vaccine at the Royal Adelaide Hospital in trials which began on Wednesday.

A further trial of the vaccine on 400 children will begin on August 4.

CSL's research and development director Andrew Cuthbertson said the vaccine should be proven by late September.

The federal government has already ordered 21 million doses of the vaccine.

"As soon as I have confirmation that the vaccine is safe and effective, I will ensure it can be rolled out to the community," federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said on Wednesday.

The adult trials, to take six weeks to complete, are testing the appropriate dose of the vaccine.

"It will be available when the government decides how to roll it out," Dr Cuthbertson told reporters in Adelaide on Wednesday.

"There is a clear distinction between CSL's role, which is to do the research, develop the vaccine and make it in large amounts and make it available to government - and government will then decide what the roll out will be.

"There may be a point where our government feels the threat justifies moving forward in deploying the vaccine."

CSL spokeswoman Rachel David said there was "no additional safety risk in rolling out the vaccine" in September or October.

She said the vaccine was similar to the currently available seasonal flu vaccine - the only difference being the new vaccine contained one strain of flu - swine flu - while the seasonal flu vaccine contained three strains of influenza.

Dr Cuthbertson said CSL was "confident that the safety profile of this vaccine will be very similar to our normal seasonal vaccines".

"We will be supplying other countries but we would supply Australia with the vaccine, and then the rest of the world," he said.

Dr Cuthbertson said swine flu had yet to mutate.

"So far at least it doesn't appear to have changed very much which I guess from the point of view of preparing a vaccine is a good thing.

"This particular virus appears to continue transmitting in the warmer parts of the year which is unusual.

"Certainly people in the northern hemisphere are very concerned about their ensuing winter - and certainly going back historically, one thing epidemiologists are worried about is what they call a second wave of the infection which can come through a year later.

"We are really in a constant battle in trying to stay ahead of the evolution of the virus, if you like, but we are very well prepared do to that.

"What we have developed, I'm pleased to say, is entirely appropriate for the current threat ... that is not to say it won't change in the future but I think so far the vaccine is quite appropriate for the current threat."

AAP