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Australia clears swine flu vaccine rollout

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday approved as safe and effective the nation's first swine flu vaccine, clearing the way for a mass adult immunisation programme later this month.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the country's drug regulator had determined, after "ex-

haustive evaluation", that the single-dose A(H1N1) vaccine was highly safe and had few side effects in adults.

"This decision now paves the way for a national vaccination programme to start later this month," Roxon said.

Australia had commissioned 21 million doses from vaccine-maker CSL, and

four million were already on standby in the nation's major cities to be distributed to doctors and other health specialists starting next week, she said.

A national programme, which would be free and voluntary for all adults, would start on September 30.

Roxon said it would be the

"biggest vaccination programme that Australia has run." Frontline health workers, pregnant women, indigenous people and those with underlying health conditions, such as asthma, cancer, diabetes, HIV and heart disease, would be targeted in the first stage of the immunisation.

— AFP