

## Government to get special swine flu vaccine

Published: 18 Oct 09 12:00 CET

Online: <http://www.thelocal.de/national/20091018-22649.html>

**Just a week after it emerged that the German armed forces was getting a different kind of A/H1N1 vaccine to the general population, *Der Spiegel* magazine reports that the government will also get special treatment.**

The general population will be offered the GlaxoSmithKline vaccine, called Pandemrix, which contains a new booster element, or adjuvant, as well as a preservative containing mercury.

Controversy has grown around the rapid licensing of the GSK vaccine – and a similar one being made by Novartis. Critics said not enough testing had been conducted before European licensing authorities rushed an approval.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, her cabinet members and ministry civil servants as well as those working for other agencies will get Celvapan, produced by US firm Baxter, which does not have the adjuvant or the preservative, according to *Der Spiegel*.

It is thought the adjuvant may lead to a stronger reaction in the patient – which to a certain degree is the point, meaning the vaccine can contain less of the virus yet still provoke the crucial immune system reaction.

But this is also what some say is the additional risk – and has led to stocks of the traditional kind of vaccine being bought in for pregnant women and young children.

Celvapan does not contain the adjuvant or the preservative. Rather, it contains entire dead viruses rather than the pieces which are in the traditional vaccine. The Baxter version is the one being given to the armed forces, as well as being made available for pregnant women and children.

It seems now that ministers and civil servants are to be included in that category.

“We have bought 200,000 doses of the non-adjuvanted vaccine Celvapan from the company Baxter,” Christoph Hübner, spokesman for the Interior Ministry confirmed to *Der Spiegel*.

It will be used for “state servants responsible for the maintenance of public order,” the magazine reported. Next to members of the cabinet and civil servants, this includes staff of the Paul Ehrlich Institute, which took the decision to order the new vaccine from GSK for the rest of the country. No explicit reason was offered as to why they should get the Baxter vaccine rather than the GSK version.

Chairman of the German Medical Association’s Drug Commission Wolf-Dieter Ludwig said the situation was a scandal. “We are unhappy about this vaccination campaign,” he said. The point of it was unknown, he suggested. “The health authorities have succumbed to a campaign by the pharma companies, which simply want to earn money from a supposed threat.”

Meanwhile some medical associations are advising their members not to administer the new vaccine. President of the German Association of General and Family Medicine, Michael Kochen, has called on German general doctors not to give it to patients. “The risks outweigh the benefits,” he said.

Wolfram Hartmann, president of the Association of Paediatricians, accused the government of making false scientific statements. He said children under the age of three should not be given the shots.

“The vaccine has not been tested on them, thus the risk is simply too great for it to be used,” he said, adding that children’s immune systems tend to overreact, which could be exacerbated by the adjuvants. He also criticised the use of mercury-containing preservatives. “One has deliberately kept this stuff out of vaccines for small children,” he said.

*The Local* ([news@thelocal.de](mailto:news@thelocal.de))