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Health Canada to toughen warnings on ADHD drugs

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Two million prescriptions for the stimulants, which increase blood pressure and speed up the pulse, were written in Canada in 2005. Use of the drugs is increasing.

Health Canada briefly pulled the ADHD drug Adderall XR from the market last year.

CBC says Health Canada plans to add tougher warnings to the stimulants in April that caution people with a family history of heart problems, patients taking another stimulant and those who engage in strenuous physical activity.

The strengthened warnings come after regulators received reports of 25 sudden deaths in American youngsters, as well as cases of heart attacks, strokes and psychosis among children and adults on the drugs.

The chance of the drugs causing sudden death is rare, about one in 100,000 for children, said Dr. Steven Nissen, a cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio and a consultant on a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

advisory panel that recommended the warning.

Families and doctors need to be alerted to the risks, he said.

"I want the physician's hand to tremble a little bit before they write the prescription for the drug," Nissen said.

Aside from Health Canada's stronger warnings, the department also cautions people with any heart risk factors to be screened before taking the drug.

In Washington on Wednesday, an advisory panel to the FDA rejected recommending that ADHD drugs carry the strongest type of warning.

The consensus move by the FDA's pediatric advisory committee leaves in doubt whether the agency will require so-called "black-box" labels on the drugs.