

# Europe postpones launch of first 'space plane'

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A replica of the ESA's space plane IXV is on display during the presentation at the European Space Research and Technology Centre in Noordwijk, on September 9, 2014

Europe said Friday it was postponing the launch next month of its first-ever "space plane" to give scientists time to finetune the mission's flight plan.

Dubbed the IXV, for Intermediate eXperimental Vehicle, the plane had

been scheduled for launch on November 18 by a Vega light rocket from Kourou, French Guiana.

"The European Space Agency (ESA), in conjunction with the French space agency CNES, has decided to carry out additional flight trajectory analyses," said Arianespace, which markets services by ESA's launchers.

"A new launch date will be announced as soon as possible," it said in a press release.

The size of a medium-sized car and developed over five years at a cost of 150 million euros (\$193 million), the IXV is the test bed for a shuttle-like vehicle that would giving Europe the ability to return to Earth from orbit.

One idea is that in a future form it could bring back astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

Studded with 300 sensors, the prototype IXV will collect data on the craft's handling and thermodynamics.

The preliminary test entails hoisting the IXV to a height of 450 kilometres (280 miles) where it will go into sub-orbital flight for 100 minutes.

It will then re-enter the atmosphere and splash down in the Pacific, where it will be recovered by ship.

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