

NOVEL H1N1 FLU: BACKGROUND ON THE SITUATION

A PANDEMIC IS DECLARED

On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a global pandemic of novel influenza A (H1N1) was underway by raising the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6. This action was a reflection of the spread of the new H1N1 virus, not the severity of illness caused by the virus. At the time, more than 70 countries had reported cases of novel influenza A (H1N1) infection and there were ongoing community level outbreaks of novel H1N1 in multiple parts of the world.

Since the WHO declaration of a pandemic, the new H1N1 virus has continued to spread, with the number of countries reporting cases of novel H1N1 nearly doubling. The Southern Hemisphere's regular influenza season has begun and countries there are reporting that the new H1N1 virus is spreading and causing illness along with regular seasonal influenza viruses. In the United States, significant novel H1N1 illness has continued into the summer, with localized and in some cases intense outbreaks occurring. The United States continues to report the largest number of novel H1N1 cases of any country worldwide, however, most people who have become ill have recovered without requiring medical treatment.

Given ongoing novel H1N1 activity to date, CDC anticipates that there will be more cases, more hospitalizations and more deaths associated with this pandemic in the United States over the summer and into the fall and winter. The novel H1N1 virus, in conjunction with regular seasonal influenza viruses, poses the potential to cause significant illness with associated hospitalizations and deaths during the U.S. influenza season.

A VIRUS EMERGES

Novel influenza A (H1N1) is a new flu virus of swine origin that first caused illness in Mexico and the United States in March and April, 2009. It's thought that novel influenza A (H1N1) flu spreads in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus, but it may also be spread by touching infected objects and then touching your nose or mouth. Novel H1N1 infection has been reported to cause a wide range of flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In addition, many people also have reported nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

The first novel H1N1 patient in the United States was confirmed by laboratory testing at CDC on April 15, 2009. The second patient was confirmed on April 17, 2009. It was quickly determined that the virus was spreading from person-to-person. On April 22, CDC activated its Emergency Operations Center to better coordinate the public health response. On April 26, 2009, the United States Government declared a public health emergency and has been actively and aggressively implementing the nation's pandemic response plan

By June 19, 2009, all 50 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have reported novel H1N1 infection. While nationwide U.S. influenza surveillance systems indicate that overall influenza activity is decreasing in the country at this time, novel H1N1 outbreaks are ongoing in parts of the U.S., in some cases with intense activity.

CDC is continuing to watch the situation carefully, to support the public health response and to gather information about this virus and its characteristics. The Southern Hemisphere is just beginning its influenza season and the experience there may provide valuable clues about what may occur in the Northern Hemisphere this fall and winter.

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