

12 June 2009

SPECIAL EDITION: INFLUENZA A (H1N1) PHASE 6 PANDEMIC

Human infections of influenza A (H1N1):

Perspective from WHO Lao P.D.R. (update 20)

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www.unlao.org/H1N1/influenzah1n1.asp

Highlights:

- **PHASE 6 DECLARED: the word is at the start of the 2009 influenza pandemic**
- Preparedness not panic: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon
- Globally, there are 27,734 confirmed human cases of influenza A (H1N1) with 141 deaths
- **There are no known suspected or confirmed human cases of influenza A (H1N1) in Lao PDR**

Current level of influenza pandemic alert: Phase 6

Late last night (11 June), the influenza pandemic alert was raised to Phase 6, the highest level on the WHO pandemic alert scale, indicating the start of global spread.

In reaching the decision to move from Phase 5 to Phase 6, the Director General, Dr Margaret Chan considered all the available evidence from the most affected countries.

The change in the alert phase indicates that a global influenza pandemic is underway and that all countries should be ready to move from pandemic preparedness to pandemic response when cases are identified in their country. However, it should be noted that at present, the pandemic is considered to be moderate not severe.

At this time, WHO considers the overall severity of the influenza pandemic to be moderate. This assessment is based on scientific evidence available to WHO, as well as input from its Member States on the pandemic's impact on their health systems, and their social and economic functioning.

The moderate assessment reflects that:

1. Most people recover from infection without the need for hospitalization or medical care.
2. National levels of severe illness from influenza A (H1N1) appear similar to levels seen during local seasonal influenza periods, although high levels of disease have occurred in some local areas and institutions.

3. Hospitals and health care systems in most countries have been able to cope with the numbers of people seeking care, although some facilities and systems have been stressed in some localities.

WHO is concerned about current patterns of disease with serious cases and deaths occurring primarily among young persons, including the previously healthy as well as in pregnant persons or those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Large outbreaks of disease have not yet been reported in many countries, and the full clinical spectrum of disease is not yet known.

For further clarification about pandemic phases please read:

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/phase/en/index.html

Global implications

The declaration of phase 6 – that a global spread of the virus is underway – puts countries on alert that they should prepare to see cases, or the further spread of cases, in the near future. As influenza pandemics typically occur in two waves, countries where outbreaks appear to have peaked should prepare for a second wave of infection.

Importantly, the announcement of phase 6 sends a signal to governments worldwide to institute their pandemic response plans including implementation of measures for disease surveillance and control in hospitals and public settings. Whether or not they have yet experienced cases yet, countries must now put into action plans to deal with worst case scenarios.

Much is still not known about the disease. As part of the response to the continuing spread of the virus, pharmaceutical companies may also be asked to switch from or speed up seasonal influenza A vaccine production to begin production of influenza A (H1N1) vaccine when it becomes available – currently expected at the end of August.

Implications for Laos

With global spread of Influenza A (H1N1) occurring, we can expect that a case will occur in Laos in very near future. Lao PDR currently remains vigilant to ensure early detection of the first cases and has been increasing public awareness of preventative measures among many other response actions.

Upon announcement of the phase change, WHO issued guidance on public health measures to countries in response to the pandemic of new influenza A (H1N1). The guidance covers general advice to help countries manage the current pandemic but also provides advice specifically to countries with no reported cases of pandemic infection – the situation in which Laos finds itself.

WHO Lao PDR met with the Lao Government on 12 June to discuss the announcement of phase 6, the guidelines and the revision and implementation of the country's pre-existing pandemic plans. Guidance includes: focusing surveillance on closed communities (for example, schools, military camps, health institutions) particularly in urban settings and preparing the health sector to handle increasing numbers of patients with respiratory disease. Much work is already being done in these areas.

Laos' preparedness activities will continue during phase 6 to ensure the country is as best able as possible to respond to an eventual spread of the disease across its borders. As the situation on the ground changes, so too will the country's response. The WHO Laos country office will continue to work closely with the Lao Government and UN Country Team.

WHO Recommendations

What to do if you have a fever and other symptoms

The symptoms of Influenza A (H1N1) in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also get diarrhoea and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, Influenza A (H1N1) may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Very severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) can lead to death.

If you suspect you may have influenza A (H1N1), you should seek medical advice. UN staff should attend the UN clinic. Other people may attend their embassy clinics, where applicable, or their local health service.

WHO with clinicians of the National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE), the United Nations, Australian and French Embassy clinics have established protocols for notification and specimen collection of suspected influenza A (H1N1) cases from the international clinics. Protocols are also in place at National hospitals.

Samples will be taken from patients meeting the suspect case definition for A (H1N1) and sent to the National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE) for confirmation. People suspecting that they have the virus are strongly encouraged to see a doctor as soon as possible for prompt sampling, diagnosis and treatment. Having detailed epidemiological, clinical and virological information on initial confirmed cases will provide an accurate description of disease characteristics in Lao PDR and will guide national control activities and facilitate an effective response.

Travel Recommendations

WHO is not recommending travel restrictions related to the outbreak of the influenza A(H1N1) virus. Individuals who are ill should delay travel plans and returning travelers who fall ill should seek appropriate medical care. These recommendations are prudent measures which can limit the spread of many communicable diseases, including influenza.

What should I do to protect myself and my family?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against Influenza A (H1N1). But you can act to help prevent the spread of the germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Take these steps to protect your health:

- See a doctor if you develop symptoms of influenza-like illness that include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue.
- Stay home from work or school to limit contact with others.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in a rubbish bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

Eating pig products is safe as long as they are cooked properly (the meat is no longer red and there is no blood in the juices) and hygienically prepared.

Global situation

As of 17.00 GMT, 10 June 2009, there were 27,737 cases from 74 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cayman Islands UKOT, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Vietnam) and 141 deaths (4 in Canada, 2 in Chile, 1 in Costa Rica, 1 in Dominican Republic, 106 in Mexico, 27 in USA).

The countries with the most number of reported cases of influenza A (H1N1) at this time are: Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, Spain, UK, and USA

Western Pacific and Local Region:

There continue to be no deaths in the Western Pacific and South East Asian regions. As of 6.00 GMT, 10 June 2009, Japan has 485 cases, Australia 1224, China 142, The Republic of South Korea 48, New Zealand 123 cases, Malaysia 5, The Philippines 54, Vietnam has 15 cases and Singapore has 18 cases. Thailand has 8 confirmed cases

Preparedness not Panic says Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon

Following the announcement of the move to Phase 6, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon cautioned against undue alarm while stressing the need for preparedness.

“The world is now at the start of the 2009 influenza pandemic,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan [told reporters](#) in Geneva. As of today, nearly 30,000 confirmed cases have been reported in 74 countries.

Mr. Ban noted that the raising of the alert level is “a formal statement about the geographic spread of disease” and “not in itself a cause for alarm.”

Speaking at his monthly news conference in New York, the Secretary-General said that though infectious, this new virus has so far not been as severe as had been feared and death rates have been low.” “But ... we must be watchful. We do not know what picture will emerge in the coming months,” he stated. “The virus has hit mainly developed countries. That is likely to soon change”.

It is also important to guard against “rash and discriminatory” action, such as travel bans or trade restrictions, the Secretary General said, pointing out that the response to any pandemic must be grounded in science.

Noting that the impact will be felt far beyond the health sector and will require coordination on every front, the Secretary-General stressed the need to safeguard the interests of those who are most vulnerable.

Where to get more information

During public health emergencies, it is important to seek accurate information about the situation. For official information on this evolving situation and for technical and communication guidance for health administrators, health professionals and the general public, please click on the following links:

WHO: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

US CDC: http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/?s_cid=swineFlu_outbreak_internal_001

France: http://www.invs.sante.fr/derniere_minute/default.asp

In Lao PDR:

For the public:

National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordination Office (NEIDCO)

Hotline Telephone: 166

UN Lao website: www.unlao.org

For technical queries:

National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE)

Telephone: 021 350 209

World Health Organization - Lao PDR

Communications Officer Cathy Williams

Email*: commdiseaseinfo.lao@wpro.who.int

Telephone: 020 514-1105

Office: 021 353902-4 ext 81839

For general medical queries:

UN Dispensary Physician & Nurse

In the first instance please email:

Ivy Caballes ivy.caballes@undp.org

Ben.Burford ben.burford@undp.org

In the second instance please call: 021 267789 or 021 267788

For after hours medical emergencies for UN staff **only** please call: 020 559 9292
