

Pandemic H1N1 2009 Virus
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Perspective from WHO Lao PDR

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Surveillance Reporting for H1N1 in Lao PDR

To conserve resources, the National Center for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE) no longer tests every suspect case of H1N1. Testing is recommended for anyone with severe respiratory disease, health care workers and in provinces that have not yet reported cases. Surveillance in Lao PDR continues to monitor influenza-like illness using a system adopted in many other countries world-wide.

Situation update for Lao PDR in week 52 of 2009 is as follows:

- Pandemic H1N1 occurrence is widespread with greater than 50% of provinces affected (currently confirmed in 13 of 17 provinces).
- The total number of cases of respiratory disease remains slightly higher than that seen at this time in previous years.
- There is currently no disruption of health care services.
- A total of 292 cases have now been laboratory confirmed (with 2 deaths) but as individual cases are no longer being tested, the number of confirmed cases will continue to underestimate the actual number of cases in Lao PDR.
- Between April 28th to December 31st, NCLE detected 582 cases of influenza, with just over 50% of them confirmed to be H1N1. The remainder of the cases were variations of seasonal influenza. This is a similar pattern to that seen in other developed and developing countries.

NCLE is scaling back the enhanced surveillance of respiratory diseases that was undertaken during the SEA Games.

Regional Update (countries bordering Lao PDR)

The H1N1 virus is widespread throughout the region. For information about Pandemic H1N1 2009 worldwide, please visit the WHO International website: www.who.int

Pandemic Vaccine for Lao PDR

WHO and UNICEF are working with the Government of Lao PDR to develop an operational package for the delivery of the H1N1 vaccine to be provided by AusAID through WHO to high-risk populations in Lao PDR. The Prime Minister is being briefed on these arrangements and a GoL Letter of Agreement is being discussed with the aforementioned agencies this week.

The H1N1 vaccination is scheduled to commence on February 22nd 2010. This will be undertaken in 141 districts in the first instance. H1N1 vaccine will be prioritized to the high risk groups of health care workers, followed by pregnant women and those with chronic illnesses. Pregnant women will receive the H1N1 vaccine at the same time as the tetanus toxoid vaccine in 99 districts which have low coverage of the tetanus vaccine. Pregnant women in the other 42 districts will only receive the H1N1 vaccine as these districts already have a high coverage of tetanus vaccine. A severe adverse event surveillance system following immunization will also be established.

In addition to the mass campaign, health workers and chronically ill persons with specified conditions will also receive vaccination according to the national vaccine deployment plan.

Ongoing issues

As always, it is important to wash your hands frequently to help protect yourself and others from infection. To protect the health of others further and also to help ensure a quick recovery if you become ill, please stay home until you are well recovered. Covering your coughs and sneezes will also help to protect others from the virus.

Know when it's time to see a doctor

Those who are at high risk for severe illness from Pandemic H1N1 should see a doctor if they develop any symptoms of the flu which may include a fever, cough, sore throat, headache and body aches.

Those at higher risk include:

- Pregnant women, particularly in second and third trimesters
- Persons with chronic (long-term) illnesses such as wheezing or asthmatic conditions, cardiac disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic metabolic diseases, chronic renal diseases, chronic neurological conditions
- Persons with haemoglobinopathies (genetically inherited disorders of red blood cell haemoglobin including sickle cell disease and the thalassaemias)
- Persons who are immunosuppressed (including from cancers, HIV/AIDS, certain drugs)
- Children under 5 years of age
- Persons with morbid obesity

All people who experience flu-like symptoms, should suspect H1N1. There is no need for testing, but if any of the following symptoms occur, seek medical care right away:

- Difficulty breathing
- Fever (temperature over 38°C) lasting more than 2 days
- Condition improves and then gets worse

Where to get more information

UN Lao website: www.unlao.org

WHO International: <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

For technical queries:

Contact the World Health Organization, Lao PDR, email commdiseaseinfo.lao@wpro.who.int , phone 021 353902-4

For general medical queries from UN staff ONLY:

Contact the UN Dispensary, Ivy Caballes, email ivy.caballes@undp.org, office phone 021 267 789. *Embassy staff should contact their normal clinic.*
