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## H1N1 (SWINE) FLU OUTBREAK UPDATE MEMORANDUM

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## H1N1 (SWINE) FLU OUTBREAK | BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As the H1N1 flu outbreak has developed, it has caused concern among many New Yorkers. The New York State Senate has put together this information sheet to help understand the current situation and the response on all levels.

As the situation continues to develop, it is important to remember that the best guidance that can be provided to people is to not panic, and to maintain high levels of hygiene, as they would to control the flu during flu season. This flu is responding to anti-flu medications and health officials are reporting that at this point it seems less virulent than the average seasonal flu.

**Please note, this situation is changing regularly, and information is constantly being updated by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH). Links to these organizations are provided at the end of this document to help you obtain the most up-to-date information.**

## CURRENT WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION PHASE OF PANDEMIC ALERT

On April 30, the WHO went to phase 5 in their scale of phases of pandemic alert. Phase 5 signifies that the WHO feels that although a pandemic has not arrived, there is significant chance of one and all countries should activate their pandemic emergency plans. From the WHO's website:

**Phase 5** is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.

## CASES – INTERNATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

As of this time, the World Health Organization is reporting that H1N1 flu has been identified in eleven countries. It began in Mexico, where it has been confirmed that 97 people are infected and 7 people have died because of H1N1 flu and thousands are suspected to be infected. Much more mild cases of the disease have since been confirmed in the United States (109), Austria (1), Canada (19), Germany (3), Israel (2), Netherlands (1), New Zealand (3), Spain (13), Switzerland (1) and the United Kingdom (8).

In the United States, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is reporting 109 confirmed cases nationally. There have been 1 case in Arizona, 14 in California, 1 in Indiana, 2 in Kansas, 2 in Massachusetts, 1 in Michigan, 1 in Nevada, 50 in New York, 1 in Ohio, 10 in South Carolina and 26 in Texas. There has been only 1 death from the disease outside of Mexico. This was of a 2 year old in Texas.

Initial cases in Queens all involved girls at St. Francis Preparatory High School. They had

just returned from a trip to Mexico. All of the cases were mild and none of the girls were hospitalized. All of the girls are reportedly recovering. On April 28, P.S. 177 became the second school in New York City to close due to illness. It is thought by Department of Health officials that the cases from P.S. 177 stemmed from familial relations with students at St. Francis.

However, a 2 year old in the Bronx and an individual in Brooklyn became the first people in New York to have confirmed cases not associated with the St. Francis outbreak. Suspected cases are being investigated in Chautauqua, Monroe and Suffolk counties. Health Commissioner Richard Daines has reported that he expects every region of the state to be effected before this outbreak is contained.

It is important to note that the United States and New York have both responded very aggressively to this outbreak. The response, combined with a more sophisticated public health system, most likely accounts for the fact that the United States, and in particular New York, are showing higher numbers of confirmed cases than Mexico, which is known to be the epicenter of the outbreak.

## WHO AND FEDERAL REACTION

The WHO and the CDC have now said there is a likelihood of a pandemic.

The WHO has increased its threat level to level 5.

On Sunday April 26, the federal (U.S.) government declared a public health emergency. On April 27, the CDC issued Emergency Use Authorizations (EUAs) for Tamiflu, Relenza and the Swine Flu Test Kit, allowing them to be used on populations for whom they had not been medically approved.

On Tuesday, April 28, the CDC issued a travel advisory against all non-essential travel to Mexico. The WHO still has not issued any travel advisories.

This is a procedural action that allows them to take several steps. The declaration allows the federal government to use several drugs for off-label use or use medications that have yet to receive approval by the FDA. It also allows actions to be taken for the federal, state and local public health departments to work together and free up resources. Finally, it releases funds for more anti-viral medications. This means availability of 2.2 million more courses of treatment for NY, in the event that a pandemic is declared.

In more concrete actions, the CDC's Division of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is releasing one-quarter of its antiviral drugs, personal protective equipment, and respiratory protection devices to help states respond to the outbreak. On Wednesday, April 29, the CDC issued guidance to the airline industry on identifying passengers who may be ill with H1N1 flu.

CDC and other officials are reporting that the H1N1 flu virus is susceptible to the prescription antiviral drugs oseltamivir and zanamivir. This is positive news, since seasonal flu is beginning to show resistance to these medications.

## NEW YORK REACTION

On Sunday, April 26, Governor Paterson also activated the health emergency preparedness for New York.

This enabled the state and local governments to receive faster access to resources and heightened the level of monitoring taking place. The state is coordinating a response through its Health Alert Network (HAN), using it to communicate and coordinate disease monitoring activity, laboratory testing, and the proper health care response with local health departments, hospitals and providers.

DOH is also monitoring the utilization of resources to ensure that medications and preventive supplies such as masks are used properly. Wadsworth Laboratory has developed a rapid testing mechanism for the identification of severe illnesses. Finally, DOH is monitoring hospital emergency department visits for spikes in visits resulting from respiratory illness and Medicaid prescriptions for increases in influenza medications. No increased level in either has currently been identified.

The New York State Department of Health (DOH) has dispensed 1,500 courses of treatment to New York City, as requested by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH). There are 6,000 total courses available in the non-pandemic stockpile.

While some shortages of Tamiflu are being reported at isolated pharmacies, the Department of Health is reporting that there is no reason to suspect a shortage of the medication. They have been in contact with manufacturers, who assure them that there is plenty available. The Department then reached out to distributors to ensure that more of the drugs are coming into the state and effected areas promptly.

There are an additional 2.4 million courses in the pandemic stockpile, in the event they become needed. These pandemic sources would be supplemented by 2.2 million courses from the federal government. It is important to note that these were purchased at an extremely discounted rate for use in a pandemic only. We would have to reimburse the difference if they were used and a pandemic was not declared by either the CDC or the WHO.

A press conference on the outbreak in New York City Sunday included Mayor Bloomberg and NYC Health Commissioner Frieden, Senator Schumer, House Members Rangel, Nader and Maloney, Majority Leader Smith, Senator Perkins, Assembly Member Wright and City Council Speaker Quinn. Subsequent press conferences have been held by state and city officials to keep the public updated about the current situation.

## PREVENTION AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND TREAT

Right now, it is important to remain calm. At this point, this is an outbreak. It is important for people to take steps to prevent the spread of disease, just as they would at any time, especially during the height of cold and flu season. Typical preventive steps include:

- Regularly washing hands with soap and water or an alcohol based solution;
- Covering your mouth or nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, don't use your hand or cough or sneeze on someone else;

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people;
- Avoiding touching nose, eyes or mouth.

Further, DOH and the CDC are asking that those who are sick stay home from work or school and limit contact with others.

If people get sick with flu-like symptoms (fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea) they are advised to reach out to a health care provider. This is especially true if they have recently travelled to, or been in contact with someone from, Mexico; San Diego or Imperial County, California; Dickinson County, Kansas; Lorain County, Ohio; or someone from St. Francis Preparatory Academy.

**There is not yet a vaccine for H1N1 flu; however, it is treatable.** Medical professionals will be able to provide the proper anti-viral medications that will help treat the disease.

If people are otherwise feeling healthy, there is no reason to stay home. St. Francis Preparatory is closed until Wednesday for cleaning. According to DOH and NYCDOHMH officials, all other otherwise healthy children should go to school unless told otherwise by local school and health officials.

## BACKGROUND

H1N1 flu is a variant of influenza that historically has been spread by those in close contact with pigs. The most common form of the virus is the H1N1 subtype, but there are others. The new strain of swine flu is of the H1N1 subtype; however, it is airborne and being passed on from human to human. This is a development that has the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) concerned about the possibility of a pandemic. Since the majority of the populace does not have regular contact with pigs, they will not have any immunity to the virus. Therefore, the disease's new ability to spread from human to human is of even more serious concern to health officials.

Experts are also concerned because at this point, the reported cases are not clustered among those who are over 64 or under 3, which is the usual high-risk group. Because of all of these factors, and the fact that the cases are not geographically bunched, the WHO is paying close attention to the matter and, as of Saturday afternoon, called the disease "a health emergency of international concern."

For further information, please visit:

[http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/swine\\_flu/index.htm](http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/swine_flu/index.htm)

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml>

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

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>