

Teleconference with H1N1 affected countries

Summary

Participants were unanimous in their advice to WHO. WHO needs to move to phase 6 quickly to protect its scientific credibility. There was no doubt on this point. Media in several countries are anticipating the move.

Some countries have clear evidence of community-level transmission. In some others, the possibility that some “silent” community-level transmission is on-going cannot be ruled out.

We are seeing different patterns within individual countries. Some have community transmission in some areas, but well-defined and potentially containable outbreaks in other areas.

Clearly, individual countries need to tailor their responses to each unique epidemiological situation.

Concerning points to make in the announcement of phase 6, WHO received valuable advice, which has been taken on board.

- The message needs to be balanced and nuanced. At present, the disease caused by H1N1 is far less severe than people have been conditioned to expect during 5 years of awaiting a pandemic caused by the H5N1 avian influenza virus.
- The unpredictable nature of influenza viruses needs to be stressed, together with the possibility that subsequent waves of infection can be more severe.
- Universal susceptibility to infection gives the virus a vast playing field. As a sheer function of number, cases of severe and fatal infections can be expected to increase.
- Countries must be given space to respond, as judged appropriate, to the local situation, in line with national capacities.
- Political leaders need to understand that the number of cases reported and the apparent speed of spread within a country can be a function of the level of surveillance and policies for testing and investigation. Countries with the largest number of cases are often those with the best surveillance and testing capacity.
- The announcement will not name countries. Transparency should not be punished.
- Vaccine issues will be covered.

- WHO is alert to the need, which may change, for seasonal vaccines in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.
- WHO continues to recommend no travel restrictions and no border closures.

Next steps

1. WHO will call a meeting of the Emergency Committee tomorrow at 13.00 Geneva time.
2. The Director-General is inviting you to participate in the meeting. Confirmation of your participation is appreciated.

The Director-General thanks you for your openness, your frank advice on sensitive issues, and your efforts to protect the scientific credibility of WHO.