

No. 0745

NOVEL FLU VIRUS UPDATE 30th April 2009

The Health Division informs the public that the Director General of the World Health Organisation has declared that the Pandemic Alert phase has been raised from level 4 to level 5 with effect from yesterday evening. This means that current situation is characterized by human-to-human spread of the virus in at least two countries in one World Health Organisation region. The Health Division is taking all the action necessary in terms of its pandemic plan to ensure that if and when a pandemic is declared we will have everything in place to deal with the situation.

Twelve countries have officially reported a total of 174 cases of swine influenza A/H1N1 infection. The United States Government has reported 91 laboratory confirmed human cases, with one death. Mexico has reported 26 confirmed human cases of infection including seven deaths.

The following countries have reported laboratory-confirmed cases with no deaths - Austria (1), Canada (19), Germany (3), Israel (2), New Zealand (14), Spain (10) Costa Rica (2), Peru (1) and the United Kingdom (5).

The extraordinary EU Council Meeting of Health Ministers is meeting today in Luxembourg to discuss the situation. Meanwhile local authorities are in daily communication with European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the EU Health Security Committee and World Health Organisation.

In Malta, enhanced surveillance has been set up in order to identify any cases that meet the criteria of a case as defined by the ECDC. Any such cases will be fully investigated and all the necessary precautions will be taken. A number of World Health Organisation persons have travelled to Mexico, and have made contact with the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit for advice. Anyone who has travelled to Mexico and develops symptoms of fever, cough or sore throat should contact his doctor urgently. Doctors have instructions on how to deal with such cases. For further information a helpline 21324086 is available and is manned by public health doctors 24/7. The Health Division advises the general public to avoid unnecessary travel to Mexico.

The Health Division is aware that a number of Maltese households have purchased antiviral medicines which are being stored in their houses. Indiscriminate use of antiviral drugs without medical advice is dangerous because of the risk of this virus developing resistance. So far this virus is responding well to anti viral treatment. If these anti viral medicines are used for normal flu or colds, this virus could become resistant and the incidence of fatality will increase. Thus it has to be stressed that anti virals should be used **ONLY** when indicated by a **Public Health Doctor**.

Finally, the Health Division must once again stress that there is no reason for alarm or panic. The Division will continue to be vigilant in the surveillance, and urges everyone to continue with their activities in a normal manner.

DOI – 30.04.2009