

## **News Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Pandemic Alert Level Increased to Level 6**

In response to the ongoing global spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus, also known as H1N1 (swine) flu, the World Health Organization (WHO) has raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6. A Phase 6 designation indicates that a global pandemic is underway.

More than 70 countries are now reporting cases of human infection with novel H1N1 flu. This number has been increasing over the past few weeks, but many of the cases reportedly had links to travel or were localized outbreaks without community spread. The WHO designation of a pandemic alert Phase 6 reflects the fact that there are now ongoing community level outbreaks in multiple parts of the world.

**WHO's decision to raise the pandemic alert level to Phase 6 is a reflection of the spread of the virus, not the severity of illness caused by the virus. It's uncertain at this time how serious or severe this novel H1N1 pandemic will be in terms of how many of those infected will develop serious complications or die from novel H1N1 infection.**

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. Overall, 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. Overall, 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.

Experience with this virus so far is limited and influenza is unpredictable. However, because novel H1N1 is a new virus, many people may have little or no immunity against it, and illness may be more severe and widespread as a result. In addition, currently there is no vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 virus.

In the United States, most people who have become ill with the newly declared pandemic virus have recovered without requiring medical treatment, however, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) anticipates that there will be more cases, more hospitalizations and more deaths associated with this pandemic in the coming days and weeks. In addition, this virus could cause significant illness with associated hospitalizations and deaths in the fall and winter during the U.S. influenza season.

The Coconino County Health Department (CCHD) is closely monitoring the novel H1N1 flu situation in coordination with the Arizona Department for Health Services (ADHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Navajo Nation Division of Health.

As of June 11, ADHS reported 597 confirmed cases and six novel H1N1 flu related deaths in Arizona.

There are currently five confirmed cases of novel H1N1 flu in Coconino County. Because many people with mild influenza do not seek medical care, it is likely that there are additional cases in communities throughout the County. There are no deaths in Coconino County associated with this illness.

To help reduce the risk of influenza and many other infectious diseases, health officials encourage the following simple actions:

- **Stay informed.** The Coconino County Health Department website will be updated regularly as information becomes available. [www.coconino.az.gov/health](http://www.coconino.az.gov/health)
- Influenza is thought to **spread mainly person-to-person** through coughing or sneezing of infected people. Some degree of spread occurs through contaminated hands. **Try to avoid close contact with sick people.**
- **Take everyday actions to stay healthy.**
  - Sneeze or cough into your sleeve; this is the preferred method of covering your cough. If you can't do this, cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and wash your hands afterwards.
  - **Wash your hands often** with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
  - **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs spread that way.
  - **Don't share eating utensils, cups or straws.**
  - **Stay home if you get sick.** Stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
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Call the CCHD Flu Information Line 928-679-7300 or visit [www.coconino.az.gov/health](http://www.coconino.az.gov/health) for updated information.

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