

PANDEMIC PHASE LEVEL 5: RISING NUMBER OF CASES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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15 new cases of infection with the novel influenza virus A(H1N1) have been confirmed in the European Union (EU) since 28 April, bringing the total number to 19: one case in Austria, three in Germany, 10 in Spain and five in the United Kingdom. In addition, two probable cases are investigated in France. All cases had returned from a stay in Mexico and had mild symptoms [1].

There is now evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus not only in Mexico, but also in the United States (US). First evidence of a case of human-to-human transmission is also reported within the EU (Spain) [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) therefore raised the level of pandemic alert from phase 4 to phase 5 on 29 April 2009, thereby shifting the focus from preparedness to response. This entails increased activity, particularly in the affected countries, to reduce the impact of the pandemic on society, such as pandemic disease surveillance using the agreed case definitions, assessment of the impact of the pandemic, issuing of advice to the public, measures regarding antiviral drugs, etc. [2]

A number of websites are keeping track of the continuously mounting numbers of suspected and confirmed cases across the world.

Regular updates on the outbreak of novel influenza virus A(H1N1) with a view to the implications for the European Union are published on the ECDC website at: <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/>. Official information is also available from WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [3,4].

In response to inquiries from public health officials, Google.org launched on 29 April 2009 the site 'Experimental Flu Trends for Mexico' (http://www.google.org/flutrends/intl/en_mx/), which provides up-to-date estimates of possible influenza activity in Mexico based on aggregated search queries. In November 2008 a close relationship was found between the number of people searching for influenza-related topics and the number of people who actually have influenza symptoms. Unlike Google Flu Trends for the United States, these estimates are not verified against historical Mexican influenza data.

Another non-official table keeping track of the case numbers world-wide has been created on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_swine_flu_outbreak_by_country

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