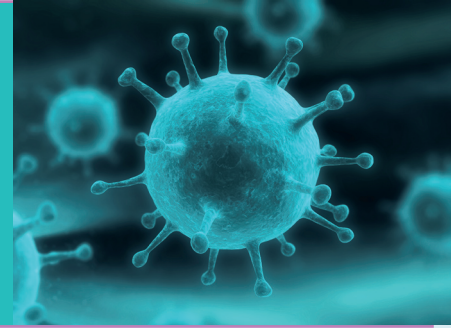




Pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009



Factsheet, April 2010



Pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009 (or “swine flu”) is a new type of influenza that is characterised by its rapid spread among humans all over the world since its emergence in April 2009. The virus has been found to contain genes from pig, bird and human influenza viruses, in a combination that has never been observed before.

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), while symptoms of the disease are mild in most people, a significant minority of people are suffering severe disease and dying from it. The majority of those people suffering severe disease have been in risk

groups: people with other chronic medical conditions such as asthma, or heart disease. However, there have also been people who became severely ill without any underlying condition (e.g. pregnant women, young children).

Pandemics can have both public health and wider socio-economic effects. Therefore it is important to ensure that society at all levels is prepared. Though the pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009 in the EU so far had less implications for the wider community, businesses and other sectors such as essential services need to ensure continuity in case several employees fall ill at the same time. The pressure will be highest on the health care sector, with many people seeking care at once. Pressure will be greatest on hospitals and their intensive care units. Hence, hospitals and health centres also need to make plans about how to deliver ‘surge capacity’.

Evidence-based public health measures used to combat seasonal flu are in place in Europe and globally for mitigation of the pandemic. The most accessible of these are regular hand-washing, good use and disposal of nasal tissues and simply staying home when developing an illness. Across the EU, Member States organized vaccination campaigns in order to provide public health protection for people in risk groups.

European Cooperation

The legal basis for European work on health threats is in Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which establishes that the fight against the major health scourges is a Community public health objective. Therefore and in accordance with the EU legislation on communicable diseases, the European Union has been preparing for pandemic influenza for several years and the Member States have set up national plans on how to respond to and manage this public health threat. However, these plans needed to be modified to fit the specifics of the 2009 virus. The European Commission has a key role in facilitating the coordination at the EU level by supporting Member States authorities in their efforts to tackle the pandemic. This is done in particular through regular coordination with national health authorities meeting in the EU Health Security Committee.





At the EU level, the Commission has set up a number of tools (such as MedISys) and structures to detect communicable diseases and to support Member States to respond to these in a coordinated manner. On 15 September 2009 the Commission adopted a strategy paper on pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009. The Commission is working in five strategic areas: vaccine development, vaccination strategies, joint procurement of the vaccine, communication with the public and support to non EU countries. In response to the Commission Communication the Council of Health Ministers adopted a set of Conclusions on 12 October.

The ECDC, established in 2005 and located in Stockholm, aims to increase European preparedness and response to infectious diseases. The organization is also responsible watching for dangerous trends in the EU and EEA/EFTA countries and produces the technical guidance for Member States on the public health and public health measures that reduce transmission.

The Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) on communicable diseases between the Member States, the World Health Organization and the Commission is a confidential system which allows them to give each other early information on important developments and sharing of epidemiological information. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is responsible for the evaluation of medicinal products and the coordination of activities of the national medicine agencies in the EU.

Following the positive scientific opinion of the EMA on pandemic vaccines, the Commission authorised so far three products for marketing in the EU.

The EU Health Security Committee, established in 2001, is chaired by the Commission and brings together all Member States to address health security issues. A key area of their work relates to influenza pandemic preparedness. During pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009 the Committee adopted three statements providing coherent approaches to some of the key issues in managing the public situation: Statement on Symptomatic Individuals Travelling, Statement on School Closures and Statement on Priority Groups for Vaccination. It also met on a regular basis to discuss risk management measures. Regular activity reports are published.

Currently the European Commission, the Member States and the scientific agencies (ECDC and EMEA) are evaluating the public health response and the management of the crisis in order to improve the pandemic preparedness at EU level. The Belgian Presidency and the Council will organize a conference on the evaluation of the (H₁N₁) 2009, which will fit into strengthening and planning general preparedness and response for future pandemics.



Global collaboration

In order to respond to the pandemic as effectively as possible, the Commission is working closely with key global partners such as the Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI that includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, United Kingdom, USA and WHO as an observer). The GHSI was established after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and is dedicated to exchanging information on health security matters and coordinating actions among its members. The GHSI has been active in responding to this pandemic with regular contacts and an extraordinary meeting was held in Brussels on 11 September 2009.

The EU is also working together with the World Health Organisation, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in response to the global threat of pandemic (H₁N₁) 2009.

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/health/communicable_diseases/diseases/influenza/h1n1/index_en.htm

About MedISys: <http://medusa.jrc.it/medisys>