

# UPDATE 1-WHO says flu pandemic remains at level 5 of 6

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GENEVA, May 7 (Reuters) - H1N1 flu is not yet spreading in a sustained way outside North America, so the global pandemic level remains at 5 out of 6, a senior World Health Organisation official said on Thursday.

"We remain at Phase 5. That is not changed," said Keiji Fukuda, acting WHO assistant director-general. "We continue to see human to human transmission, community-level transmission, primarily in North America. We are not seeing it yet anywhere else," he told a news conference.

WHO Director-General Margaret Chan last week raised the alert level to 5 -- indicating a pandemic is imminent -- and is waiting for evidence the new strain has taken hold outside the Americas before declaring a pandemic is under way.

A move to Phase 6 would speed up efforts already under way to produce and distribute antiviral drugs and vaccines.

Chan has stressed that a move to the top level "does not mean, in any way, that we are facing the end of the world" and reflects assessments of how the virus is spreading, and not the severity of its effects.

The virus has killed 42 people in Mexico and two in the United States, according to the WHO's latest tally. Many of the 2,099 people with confirmed infections have had relatively mild symptoms similar to the seasonal flu.

Fukuda said governments should do all they can to get ready for possible infections with the H1N1 strain, which spreads through coughs, sneezes, and air droplets.

"This is a time in which we can work with countries to be as prepared as possible," he told a news conference in Geneva.

"Our bottom line is that there are things that countries can do, that we can help them with, to get them prepared for this potential increase in people getting sick."

Up to 20 governments worldwide, including China and Russia, have imposed restrictions on pork imports from Mexico, the United States and other flu-affected countries. Responding to those trade bans, Fukuda said that meat does not pose a risk from the new virus, which is not food-borne.

"Eating pork is not a danger in terms of getting this infection," he said. (Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay, Michael Kahn and Jonathan Lynn; Writing by Laura MacInnis)

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