

# Japan swine flu cases mushrooming

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## WHO may reportedly hike swine flu alert level

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TOKYO (MarketWatch) -- Fears of a spreading swine-flu outbreak grew Monday amid a sudden reported increase in cases in Japan.

The nation's number of cases of swine flu, also known as influenza A-H1N1, reached a government tally of 92, after 84 people in Osaka and Hyogo prefectures, including high school and college students, were confirmed as infected with the H1N1 strain of influenza A, Kyodo reported Monday.

But in a separate report, Kyodo said its own calculations show that the number of Japanese cases of new flu infections was higher, at 129.

Japanese authorities confirmed Saturday that a student in Kobe who had not been overseas was infected, according to a New York Times report.

The Times report said the World Health Organization may soon raise its pandemic alert level to 6 -- the highest level -- due to the rise in Japanese cases.

By definition, if the World Health Organization finds sustained community transmission -- infections between people with no connection to travel from North America -- it will "presumably" raise its pandemic alert level to 6, since Japan is outside of the WHO Americas region, the report said.

Designation of a phase 6 would indicate that a global pandemic is under way, according to the WHO.

The level was still set at phase 5 shortly before 11 p.m. Eastern time Sunday, according to a spokeswoman for WHO. The U.N. health body defines phase 5 as a "strong signal that a pandemic is imminent."

In a recent update posted on its Web site, the WHO said 39 countries have officially reported a total of 8,480 cases of the influenza A-H1N1 infection, with Mexico reporting 2,895 laboratory-confirmed human cases of infection.

## Call for 'calm'

The spread of the flu cases may have "notable effects" on the global economy, the International Monetary Fund's first deputy managing director, John Lipsky, said at a news conference Monday in Tokyo, according to Kyodo.

Meanwhile, Japan's Prime Minister Taro Aso called for calm Monday following the reports of the new domestic flu infections.

He also said the government has no plans to ask citizens to scale down corporate activity, Kyodo reported.

The outbreak led to a decision to suspend classes for certain periods at more than 1,000 schools in Osaka and Hyogo.

Several companies have also taken measures to deal with the spread of the flu infections.

Cosmetics company Shiseido Co. ([JP:4911](#) **1,656**, +59.00, +3.69%) has banned 25,000 workers at domestic group firms from taking any business trips within Japan after already having ended overseas visits, an article in the Nikkei newspaper's Monday morning edition.

Mass electronics retailer Edion Corp. ([JP:2730](#) **577.00**, +18.00, +3.22%) has told its sales personnel who use public transportation to avoid peak travel times, allowing them to "stagger" their starting times, the report said.

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