

New H1N1 flu not going away: U.S. health agency

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By Julie Steenhuysen

CHICAGO (Reuters) - More than 1 million people in the United States may have been infected with the new **H1N1 swine flu**, U.S. health officials said on Friday, and infections continue to rise.

The new **H1N1** influenza virus that has triggered a global pandemic is infecting people in the United States well beyond the normal period for influenza season, Dr. Anne Schuchat of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters in a telephone briefing.

"The key point is this new infectious disease is not going away," Schuchat said. "In the U.S., we're still experiencing a steady increase in the number of reported cases, with 6,000 new cases reported just this week."

That represents the largest number of cases to be reported in a one-week span since the beginning of the outbreak in April.

The World Health Organization is now reporting more than 67,000 confirmed cases of **H1N1** flu and some 300 deaths worldwide.

In the United States, there have been 27,717 laboratory-confirmed cases, including more than 3,000 hospitalizations and 127 deaths.

"We are estimating about a million people in the U.S. or more have gotten this virus at a time of year when people really aren't continuing to get the seasonal influenza viruses," Schuchat said.

"A big question that everybody really has is what kind of illness, hospitalization and deaths will we see when our winter flu season begins?"

'NOVEL VACCINE'

Schuchat said vaccine makers are developing **H1N1** vaccine that will be tested in clinical trials over the summer.

She said the CDC has not yet decided if it will recommend people get the new shots when flu season arrives in North America in the fall. But Schuchat said the CDC is asking state and local health departments to draw up plans for how to handle distribution of the vaccines.

"We want states to be ready to offer and administer this novel vaccine," she said, focusing especially on how to reach younger people, pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions like asthma and diabetes that put them at higher risk.

At a three-day meeting in Atlanta of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which advises the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC researchers said one vaccination scenario could include as many as 600 million doses.

That could place a heavy burden on cash-strapped health departments, which would likely have to distribute two doses of the new vaccine, which might be required for full immunity, in addition to the regular seasonal flu vaccination program.

Schuchat said the CDC continues to watch for changes in the virus in the Southern Hemisphere, where flu season is now in full swing.

"We have not seen any changes in the virus that are important at this point," she said.

In the United States, the new flu continues to spread, with 12 states reporting widespread flu activity, something Schuchat said was "very unusual for this time of year."

"That is just one feature that helps us to see that what we are seeing is quite different," she said.

She said flu infections are even affecting children attending camps in the Northern Hemisphere summer, with outbreaks in 34 camps in 16 states.

"Some have actually closed for the summer."

