

Statements by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano on WHO Decision to Declare Novel H1N1 Virus Outbreak a Pandemic

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano issued the following statements today in response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) decision to raise the pandemic threat level on the novel H1N1 virus.

"Today's decision by the WHO was expected and doesn't change what we have been doing here in the United States to prepare for and respond to this public health challenge. Once we saw how fast this virus was spreading, we activated our pandemic plans and started doing all the things we needed to do to keep the public as safe and secure as possible," said Secretary Sebelius. "What this declaration does do is remind the world that flu viruses like H1N1 need to be taken seriously. Although we have not seen large numbers of severe cases in this country so far, things could possibly be very different in the fall, especially if things change in the Southern Hemisphere, and we need to start preparing now in order to be ready for a possible H1N1 immunization campaign starting in late September."

"We responded to the H1N1 outbreak from the outset with the presumption that a pandemic was likely, so this decision comes as no surprise. We acted aggressively to stay ahead of the virus as it spread across the country. Now our challenge is to prepare for a possible return in the fall," said Secretary Napolitano. "The Obama Administration has been working together across the government and will continue to do so over the weeks and months ahead to keep the American people safe. We are reaching out to our partners in state and local government, in school districts and the private sector to urge them to modify and update their pandemic plans. We are working with our scientists to test and prepare a possible vaccine. And we are working with governments around the world to share what we know and learn from what is happening in their countries."

http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1244741856481.shtm