

**June 11, 2009**

**San Jose, California** The World Health Organization (WHO) raised the Pandemic Alert Level to Phase 6 because the new influenza virus - H1N1 (swine flu) – has been found in more places around the world. This does not mean there has been an increase in the flu's severity, in fact the WHO stated that the pandemic is only "moderate in severity".

Phase 6 indicates that the new flu virus spreads easily from one person to another, is found in many countries, and that a global pandemic is underway. According to the WHO, that now describes the H1N1 flu most accurately. Moving to Phase 6 will primarily activate a response in countries that have not already begun preparing or responding to the situation.

"Phase 6 has been declared because of the global spread of H1N1," stated Dr. Marty Fenstersheib, Santa Clara County Health Officer. "Pandemic means global, and it really doesn't indicate the severity or mildness of the virus. The evidence to date overwhelming shows that the virus is mild in most cases.

Currently, laboratory results have identified a total of 98 cases of H1N1 in Santa Clara County: 50 probable cases and 48 confirmed cases, with 9 hospitalizations. All the hospitalized patients have been discharged, have fully recovered or are recovering at home. The median age for flu cases in Santa Clara County is 17 years of age.

Since this is a new flu virus for which the population has little or no immunity, health officials are concerned that as it passes through populations, it could mutate (change) to become more serious and return with increased force in the fall/winter influenza season.

Because Santa Clara County is already responding to local cases of H1N1 (swine) flu, the change to Phase 6 does not affect our response. The Public Health Department will continue to monitor the situation, perform laboratory tests, provide recommendations to the public, schools, and clinicians, and implement any needed measures to protect the public's health.

Today's announcement marks the declaration of the first global influenza epidemic in 41 years. The last one was the Hong Kong flu epidemic of 1968, which killed an estimated 1 million people worldwide. A normal seasonal flu outbreak kills about 250,000 to 500,000 people worldwide.

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