

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HHS Declares Public Health Emergency for Swine Flu

The Department of Health and Human Services today issued a nationwide public health emergency declaration in response to recent human infections with a newly discovered swine influenza A (swine flu) virus.

The formal declaration of a Public Health Emergency (PHE) is a tool that facilitates HHS' preparation and mobilization for disasters and emergencies. For example, PHEs were recently declared for flooding in North Dakota, the Inauguration, and several 2008 hurricanes.

Today's declaration, made under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act, will help HHS prepare for prevention and mitigation activities by enabling Food and Drug Administration (FDA) emergency use authorizations of drugs, devices, or medical tests under certain circumstances.

Specifically, today's PHE will enable the FDA to review and issue emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for the use of certain laboratory tests to help detect the newly discovered strain of influenza and for the emergency use of certain antivirals.

"HHS is taking these steps today to be proactive in responding to this new influenza virus by offering national tools in support of community-led preparedness and response efforts," Acting HHS Secretary Charles Johnson said. "The declaration allows us the flexibility, while we learn more about the virus and its impact in the United States, to take additional steps to fully mobilize our prevention, treatment and mitigation capabilities should those actions become necessary."

In addition to the declaration, HHS leaders are working together across operating divisions to coordinate response to the swine flu outbreak. For example, the FDA, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working together to develop a vaccine precursor that could be used to develop a vaccine for this swine flu virus.

To date, there have been 20 confirmed cases of swine Influenza A (swH1N1) in California, Texas, Kansas, New York, and Ohio. No deaths in the U.S. have been reported due to the illness. Additional cases of the virus have been confirmed in Mexico and Canada.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans;

however, human infections with swine flu do occur, and cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu viruses have been documented.

The public health emergency declaration is available at www.hhs.gov/secretary/phe_swh1n1mhtml. For information on swine flu, visit www.cdc.gov/swineflu.

Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.

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