



# INYO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

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**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## **Novel H1N1 Influenza Update – June 30, 2009**

### **Mono County and beyond:**

Today, Dr. Rick Johnson, Health Officer for Inyo and Mono County, reported 4 more laboratory confirmed cases of “swine flu” or “novel H1N1 influenza” in Mono County locals. Tests from other individuals are still pending, so the numbers will undoubtedly increase. All were students at schools in Mammoth Lakes when they became sick, except for one adult. None were hospitalized, and all have completely recovered. Many family members were sick at the same time. Although there has not been an increase in hospitalized patients at Mammoth Hospital with influenza-like illness, Sierra Park Clinics experienced a substantial surge of patients during the first 3 weeks of June.

During that same period of time, as the school year was winding down, there does not appear to be any increase in school absenteeism. Dr. Johnson concludes that students continued to go to school in spite of being sick, in order to finish out the end-of-year activities.

**What is the take-home message?** This influenza bug is thriving in our community, and will likely be here all summer. There is no way for the Public Health Department to stop its spread. We as a community have become complacent about it, because we have been “lucky”, with no life-threatening illness in locals. Dr. Johnson wishes to remind everyone to take common-sense steps to prevent the flu from spreading by covering their coughs, washing hands, staying away from those who are sick with flu-like symptoms, and – most important - staying home when they are sick.

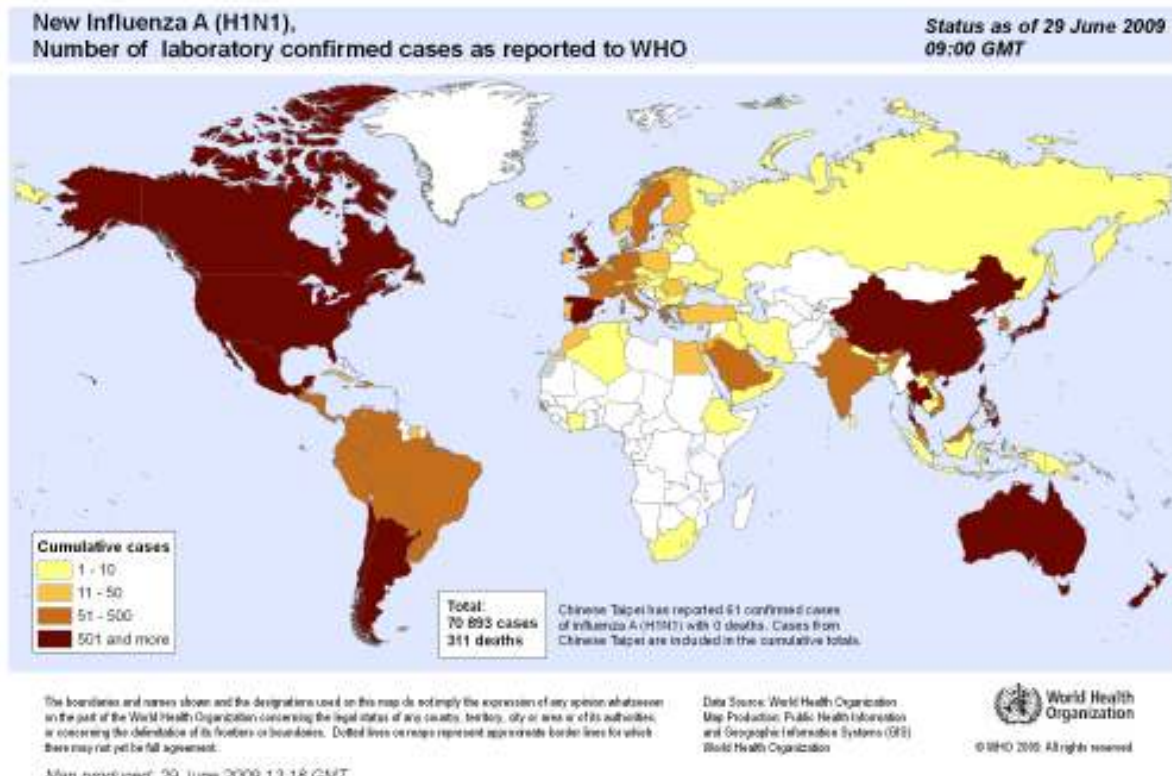
### **California/USA:**

In California, the novel H1N1 influenza has been reported in 43 counties, with over 1,500 confirmed cases, 142 hospitalizations, and 17 deaths. Most of the deaths have been in young and middle-aged persons, with about half having pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, emphysema, diabetes, obesity, and pregnancy. This is very different than the annual seasonal flu, which kills about 4,500 persons in California - most of them very elderly – and in the winter, not summer. All states have now reported cases, with California being one of 12 states still reporting widespread influenza activity. Virtually all influenza-like illness across the country is now “swine flu”, as seasonal flu as disappeared.

Now it has moved from school to camp. The Muscular Dystrophy Association has cancelled its 47 summer camp programs for 2,500 children. Boy Scout camps, cruise ships, and jails have reported clusters of illness around the world.

### Worldwide:

The novel H1N1 influenza has now been reported in 105 countries, with over 70,000 cases, and over 300 deaths. This is more deaths in the last 4 months than from the “bird flu”, which has been around since 2003. Note on the map below that central Africa has yet to report cases. This is a key area for a number of reasons: the southern hemisphere is just entering winter with seasonal flu about to start, bird flu is very active there, and there is a large HIV positive population. Who knows what will come “out of Africa” this fall!



### Vaccine/Tamiflu:

No vaccine currently exists for the “swine flu”, but the CDC is aggressively putting the development of a vaccine on a fast track. If all goes perfect, expect a vaccine sometime this fall or winter. It will be separate from the seasonal flu vaccine, it will arrive later, it will likely be targeted toward highest risk groups (the young) rather than the elderly, and it will likely require 2 shots at least 3 weeks apart. This will be a logistical nightmare for health departments, which are underfunded, and which will rapidly get fatigued. The only remaining designated funding for pandemic influenza planning and response runs out today, June 30<sup>th</sup>. Ironic!

It gets worse. The first case of novel H1N1 influenza infection that is resistant to Tamiflu has just been reported out of Denmark. While the patient was receiving the drug, the bug developed resistance to Tamiflu. This finding is not unexpected, although certainly not welcome. Thus far, other than supportive care, Tamiflu has been the only pharmaceutical tool available for healthcare workers to fight this flu. Those who have gotten seriously ill with pneumonia and died have done so not because of bacterial infections responsive to antibiotics, but due to primary viral pneumonias within several days of illness onset, just like in all previous pandemics.

### **Perspective:**

Keep your focus on barbecue and ice cream, but don't forget about flu. Some individuals have said to us, "No one cares about swine flu now.....I never want to hear swine flu again". Well, we had better care, because we are going to hear about it for several years. This bug has been described as a baby – no one knows what it will be when it grows up!

Just because it is summer, don't let down your guard. Sure, protect yourself with DEET and sun block and good hydration, but follow the take-home message above.

The big questions will be answered this fall and winter when the flu season returns. Will several flu viruses circulate at once? Will the swine flu virus take over? Will the relatively mild swine flu virus suddenly become more deadly?

When this – or another virus – decides to attack, we will not be able to contain it – wishful thinking. In this era of jet travel, neither closing schools or borders or quarantining or isolation will keep it from getting here. They might only lessen its impact. Vaccines and Tamiflu will be too little – too late.

Fortunately, we have missed the big one this time. The best way to prepare for a public health disaster is to focus our attention on being as healthy as we can be, and to have good access to quality healthcare.

And don't forget, every day there are on average 110 fatalities and 6,800 injuries in motor vehicle crashes in the USA, many associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs. Be safe – and stay well!!