



World Health Organization Press Release – 02 November 2009

## **Afghanistan closes schools in response to H1N1 influenza outbreak in Kabul and Herat; WHO promises vaccine**

The Ministry of Public Health has reported that 75 cases of Influenza A H1N1 in the Afghan population have been confirmed in the last three days, including two deaths. The latest findings consist of 68 cases from Kabul including children from schools and universities, 6 cases from Herat and one case from Balkh. From July onward, an additional 271 cases had been confirmed among travelers working in the country and the disease had been contained with no reported deaths.

Yesterday the Afghanistan Emergency and Disaster Committee chaired by second Vice President announced the decision to close schools and universities in the country for three weeks. The Emergency Committee also advised anyone with fever to stay home from work and those with mild symptoms to wear a mask when attending public places.

The Emergency Committee further is requesting the Government of Afghanistan for about \$60 million to purchase medicines, supplies and equipment for health facilities, hospitals and respiratory intensive care units to treat the expected high numbers of influenza cases. They are also requesting WHO assistance to provide the new vaccine against pandemic influenza H1N1 to protect health workers and high risk groups.

WHO Geneva has received contributions of 200 million doses of pandemic vaccine from GSK, Sanofi and MedImmune, and 9 countries - US, Australia, Brazil, France Italy, Norway, New Zealand, UK and Switzerland – and is preparing to deploy the vaccines as quickly as possible to cover at least 2% of the population in developing countries. It is expected that Afghanistan will receive vaccine from WHO in late November or December according to their request and demonstrated capacity to deploy the vaccine to reach the targeted population.

WHO advice to individuals to protect themselves from the influenza is as follows:

- Avoid touching your mouth and nose with unclean hands;
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, or cleanse them with a standard “hand sanitizer” on a regular basis as virus transmission is usually from the infective respiratory droplets remaining on contact surfaces.
- Reduce the time spent in crowded settings if possible. Stay at least one meter away from persons who are ill; wear a mask in public transport or areas where you may be in close contact with ill persons.
- You should not take an antiviral, such as Tamiflu, unless your health care provider advises you to do so, to avoid causing viral resistance to the available anti-viral drugs.

Online resources for more information about any aspect of pandemic influenza include: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int), [www.emro.who.int/afghanistan](http://www.emro.who.int/afghanistan) and [www.moph.gov.af](http://www.moph.gov.af) .

WHO Afghanistan, 2nd November 2009:

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