

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean would like to share with the media a statement published by WHO headquarters in response to circulation of inaccurate information and misquotations regarding pandemic H1N1.

Statement of the World Health Organization

The current H1N1 influenza pandemic is a scientifically well-documented event in which the emergence and spread of a new influenza virus has caused unusual patterns of disease throughout the world.

The new virus has led to patterns of death and illness not normally seen in influenza infections. Most of the deaths caused by the pandemic influenza have occurred among younger people, including those who were otherwise healthy. Pregnant women, younger children and people of any age with certain chronic lung or other medical conditions appear to be at higher risk of more complicated or severe illness. Many of the severe cases have been due to viral pneumonia, which is harder to treat than bacterial pneumonias usually associated with seasonal influenza. Many of these patients have required intensive care.

WHO recognizes that global cooperation with a range of partners, including the private sector, is essential to pursue public health objectives today and in the future. Any allegation that the public health situation arising from this influenza pandemic was exaggerated to bring economic benefit to industry is scientifically wrong and historically incorrect.

An external review of the global response to the pandemic influenza began this week. The goal of the review is to improve how the international community works together to protect global health during a public health emergency. WHO welcomes the opportunity to learn from this in-depth assessment.

The review is part of a scheduled evaluation of the functioning of the International Health Regulations, which is an international agreement among countries to facilitate global responses to major health risks. The H1N1 pandemic influenza is the first major test of the revised agreement since it was implemented worldwide in 2007.

The Regional Office uses this opportunity to reiterate its firm and long-standing position regarding pandemic H1N1. Since the beginning of the outbreak, ministries of health and WHO Regional Office have combined efforts to control and minimize the effects of the pandemic on the general public.

The Regional Office has provided Member States with evidence-based recommendations, enabling them to take appropriate and measured actions in order to respond to the threats of pandemic H1N1.

During the course of the pandemic, the Regional Office has called for and hosted a number of high-level ministerial and expert meetings and has produced various technical guidelines to ensure safety and the stability of normal life without causing undue anxiety or restricting regional or international trade and travel.

A high level of preparedness and a measured response by the Member States, together with efforts of WHO and other partners, including the media, have reduced the risks of pandemic H1N1 to a large extent. If we had not been prepared and had not responded promptly and adequately, the pandemic could have had much more severe consequences.

The Regional Office reiterates its recognition of the importance of the media as partners in raising the awareness of the public on global health issues. Safeguarding health is our collective responsibility.

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