

Ministry of Public Health
Public Health Advice No. 9
Subject: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009
30 November 2009

The outbreak of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 has been ongoing and spreading to various communities in more than 206 countries worldwide. It is expected that the pandemic will not be ending soon. Most of the patients are children and working-age adults (range, 5–49 years) rather than the elderly. The transmission of the disease is similar to that of seasonal influenza; one is likely to get infected with the disease from a patient's droplets of coughs and sneezes. Most patients recover from the illness in a week. Only a small number of them develop severe complications like pneumonia and respiratory failure, and become fatal. People with chronic diseases, or who are obese, as well as pregnant women have been found to be 4–5 times more likely to have severe symptoms, compared to normal people. However, it has also been found that some healthy people falling ill with the disease have such severe symptoms; and they need to be urgently hospitalized. Currently, a slight change in the virus has been discovered in a few patients but their symptoms have not become more severe. Moreover, the resistance to the available antiviral drugs (oseltamivir and zanamivir) at the level considered as a public health problem has not been occurred.

For Thailand, the outbreak of the disease in Bangkok and its vicinity has already reached its peak but has yet to end. The pandemic has reached almost all districts in all provinces and is now spreading out to rural areas, particularly those in the northern and northeastern regions of the country. In the central region, the outbreak tends to increase in some provinces. In general, it is expected that in the next three months there will be a risk of a new round of the pandemic if it is stimulated by some additional factors like colder weather, spreading of the disease from countries in the northern hemisphere. Moreover, a variety of places in the country will be crowded with a number of people celebrating special events. This is even the risk of rapid viral transmission. At present, a new round of the pandemic is signalled with some outbreaks in schools and military camps.

To be well-prepared for handling another round of the pandemic in order that the number of patients and deaths as well as social and economic impacts could be reduced to an absolute minimum, the Ministry of Public Health and agencies of all sectors are prepared for prevention and control of the disease, care of patients, and the stockpiling of antiviral drugs, procurement of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine and vaccination of high-risk groups. The Ministry of Public Health, on this occasion, provides the advice on prevention of the disease and reduction of the outbreak as follows:

Advice for general public

1. Cover one's mouth and nose with tissue paper or a sleeve of one's own shirt whenever coughing or sneezing. Wear a surgical mask when falling ill with influenza to prevent viral transmission.
2. Wash one's hands often with water and soap, or rub them with alcohol gel. Clean surfaces or objects frequently touched by people.
3. Avoid being at places with high risk of infection like crowded and poorly ventilated places for a long time. If necessary, one must protect oneself properly; those in high-risk groups are advised to wear surgical masks.

4. Suspend travelling, studying, or working if falling ill with influenza until the illness has been cured for at least 1 day. Avoid closely socializing with or using things together with other people.

Advice for ones having to be among a crowd of people

While the pandemic influenza is ongoing, any outdoor or indoor activities attended by a great number of people such as live entertainment events, conferences, sports events, exhibitions, weddings, festivities, merit-making ceremonies, and so forth possibly are the sources of viral transmission. Participants of those activities are likely to encounter risk of the infection, and they are advised to practise as follows:

Advice for participants of activities

1. One developing influenza-like symptoms like having fever, coughs, sore throat, nasal mucus, though not severely, is advised to stay at home for 7 days since the day of falling ill or 1 day after one's illness has been cured. Also, one should not take part in activities with a large number of people. If necessary, one is advised to wear a surgical mask all the time and wash one's hands often.
2. The people in a high-risk group including those with chronic diseases, pregnant women, the elderly over 65 years of age, children under 2 years of age, ones with low immunity, and ones with obesity have higher risk of developing severe illness if they get sick with this influenza. These people are advised to avoid crowded places, especially in the epidemic areas, in order to decrease the likelihood of infection.
3. People taking part in any activities are recommended to observe the principle of hygiene like washing their hands often with water and soap or alcohol-based cleaner. Whenever coughing or sneezing, they are advised to cover their nose and mouth with tissue paper. In case of having no tissue paper or failing to use it, do not do so with their hands since the hands will be contaminated with the virus and then contaminate widely a variety of belongings. To minimize the spread of influenza virus, coughing and sneezing at the sleeve of their own shirt instead is recommended.
4. Wearing a surgical mask is very useful to one who has some symptoms of the illness since this really helps prevent the viral transmission when coughing and sneezing. It is not necessary for one who has no symptoms to wear a surgical mask. Wearing it, however, can be useful for preventing infection as being at a crowded places where there might be an influenza patient.

Advice for organizers or hosts of events

1. Event organizers are advised to provide in advance the information about prevention of viral transmission for their target participants through various means such as sending information letters to the participants, publishing advice on prevention of the disease in newspapers, and organizing exhibitions and announcing prevention measures at the events.
2. Event organizers are advised to facilitate prevention of viral transmission for their participants through the following means:
 - Place a signboard stating the advice or assign some staff to provide the advice for anyone who has some influenza-like symptoms at the entrance of the event venue.
 - Provide enough wash basins, soap, and tissue paper in lavatories.

- Assign a cleaner to regularly and even more often clean utensils and objects that are frequently touched by a lot of people such as handrails, doorknobs, restrooms, etc. with detergent-mixed water or proprietary cleaner. (If one can use any of one's body parts like one's back to push open doors, this will help decrease the chance of contracting the virus.)
- Provide some surgical masks for ones with influenza-like symptoms, who really need to take part in the activities.
- Set up a first-aid spot to provide primary care for the patients with influenza-like symptoms. Separate them from other participants and facilitate sending them home or to a hospital.
- It is advisable to lessen the density of participants by, for example, increasing the number of buses taking participants to the event, setting up food stalls at various spots of the venue, etc.
- Provide various options to replace participating in the event like providing information through websites or broadcasting.

Information sources: Local public health agencies

1. **In Bangkok:** Disease Control Division, Department of Health, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration: Tel. 0 2245 8106, 0 2246 0358, 0 2354 1836

2. **In other provinces:** Provincial Public Health Office in each of the provinces

For more information, please visit the Ministry of Public Health's website: www.moph.go.th and for questions, call MOPH's Hotline Centre at 1422 around the clock and Department of Disease Control's Operations Centre at 0 2590 3333.
