

FAQ's**Updated 04.27.09 at 7:20 p.m.****How will the U.S government respond to the World Health Organization's (WHO) decision to raise the alert level?**

For the last several days, the federal government has already been taking actions consistent with what the WHO recommends for phase 4, such as increased surveillance and heightened communications designed to reduce the risk of exposure.

Will the United States Government issue a travel advisory to avoid travel to Mexico?

After consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the State Department issued a travel advisory on Monday recommending citizens avoid non-essential travel to Mexico. The travel advisory will remain in effect until public health officials determine the risk from the outbreak has subsided.

The State Department will continue to keep American citizens currently in Mexico and those considering travel to Mexico informed through the Warden Message system. This information is available at state.gov, travel.state.gov and through the U.S. Embassy in Mexico at http://mexico.usembassy.gov/eng/eacs_public_announcement.html

DHS along with federal partners continue to consult with CDC to determine appropriate public health measures. In addition to the measures we are currently taking, the U.S. is considering many of the relevant actions recommended, including implementing layered screening measures. The measures we are currently undertaking are fully consistent with the U.S. Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan, which we operate as an obligation under the International Health Regulations.

Who has the authority to order quarantines?

Local, state, and federal public health officials can issue quarantines under each jurisdiction's legal authority. At the state and local level, each state has varying laws for implementing quarantines. Most, however, allow for local and state public health agencies to issue quarantine orders supported by local law enforcement.

At the federal level, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has established legal federal authorities pertaining to the implementation of a quarantine and enforcement. Under approval from HHS, the Surgeon General has the authority to issue quarantines necessary to prevent the introduction, transmission or spread of communicable diseases.

In addition, U.S. Customs and Coast Guard Officers assist in the enforcement of quarantine orders. Other DOJ law enforcement agencies including the U.S. Marshals, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) may also enforce quarantines. Military personnel are not authorized to engage in enforcement.

Is the National Pandemic Strategy and Implementation Plan in effect?

Yes.

What role, if any, does the FEMA administrator play in the ongoing response, as principal domestic emergency management advisor to the president?

Absent a Stafford Act Declaration, FEMA is monitoring the current outbreak and is ready to position assets to assist state and local jurisdictions as the need arises.

Is there a pre-designated pandemic national Principal Federal Official (PFO)? Who is it?

As announced by the White House on April 26, Secretary Napolitano is the national principal federal official.

Are there regional PFOs and Federal Coordinating Officers for pandemic, and who are they?

Yes, there are five regional PFO positions and 10 deputy PFO's. Each team also includes a Federal Coordinating Official from FEMA. Currently, the department is reviewing staffing requirements should PFO teams need to be deployed.

Have there been national pandemic exercises, how many and when?

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Health and Human Services (HHS), CDC, and other federal departments and agencies have participated in numerous regional and national-level exercises over the past four years. In addition, the Federal Government has ensured that states have finalized and exercised plans.

Are there current plans to shut down the border?

No. DHS is consulting closely with the CDC to determine appropriate public health measures. The CDC does not recommend closing the border as an effective public health measure at this time.

What steps are you taking to prevent those with flu-like symptoms from crossing the border?

As part of Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) routine procedures, if someone crossing the border appears ill, the person is referred to a CDC quarantine station or a local public health official for evaluation. There is no mandatory quarantining at this time. If a person tests positive for influenza, a sample is sent to the CDC for confirmation.

Who is taking the lead on behalf of the federal government?

Secretary Napolitano and the Department of Homeland Security have the overall lead for coordinating the federal response to the current swine influenza outbreak in the United States. The Department is closely coordinating with HHS and CDC.