

From Dr. Margaret Chan (Director-General of the WHO)

*The virus is contagious, spreading easily from one person to another, and from one country to another. As of today, nearly 30,000 confirmed cases have been reported in 74 countries.*

*I have conferred with leading influenza experts, virologists, and public health officials. In line with procedures set out in the International Health Regulations, I have sought guidance and advice from an Emergency Committee established for this purpose.*

*On the basis of available evidence, and these expert assessments of the evidence, the scientific criteria for an influenza pandemic have been met.*

*I have therefore decided to raise the level of influenza pandemic alert from phase 5 to phase 6.*

*The world is now at the start of the 2009 influenza pandemic.*

*No previous pandemic has been detected so early or watched so closely, in real-time, right at the very beginning. The world can now reap the benefits of investments, over the last five years, in pandemic preparedness.*

*We have a head start. This places us in a strong position.*

*On present evidence, the overwhelming majority of patients experience mild symptoms and make a rapid and full recovery, often in the absence of any form of medical treatment*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*A characteristic feature of pandemics is their rapid spread to all parts of the world. In the previous century, this spread has typically taken around 6 to 9 months, even during times when most international travel was by ship or rail.*

*Countries should prepare to see cases, or the further spread of cases, in the near future. Countries where outbreaks appear to have peaked should prepare for a second wave of infection.*

*Guidance on specific protective and precautionary measures has been sent to ministries of health in all countries. Countries with no or only a few cases should remain vigilant.*

*Countries with widespread transmission should focus on the appropriate management of patients. The testing and investigation of patients should be limited, as such measures are resource intensive and can very quickly strain capacities.*

*WHO has been in close dialogue with influenza vaccine manufacturers. I understand that production of vaccines for seasonal influenza will be completed soon, and that full capacity will be available to ensure the largest possible supply of pandemic vaccine in the months to come.*