

CITY OF BALTIMORE

SHEILA DIXON, Mayor



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Olivia D. Farrow, Esq., R.S.,
Interim Commissioner
1001 E. Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Brian Schleiter

PHONE: 443-984-2623

Mediahealth@baltimorecity.gov

Statement from Baltimore City Health Department Interim Commissioner Olivia D. Farrow on WHO pandemic announcement

BALTIMORE, MD (June 11, 2009) – Today, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the level of its influenza pandemic alert from phase 5 to phase 6, which means that a H1N1 (swine) flu pandemic is under way. This development only means that the virus continues to spread rapidly around the world. It does **not** mean that more people are getting seriously sick at higher rates.

In Baltimore, as of noon today, there have been 31 confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza. Most cases have been mild and have required no medical treatment. Although the virus is entirely new, is contagious and spreads easily from one person to another, what we've seen is comparable to a seasonal flu.

The Baltimore City Health Department is actively preparing for a flu pandemic. We are working closely with other government agencies, local health care providers, community partners and city business leaders to develop and implement a coordinated flu pandemic response plan. **The change in the WHO pandemic alert level does not necessitate any change to our ongoing H1N1 flu response.**

We encourage citizens to keep themselves healthy by practicing good personal hygiene:

- Wash your hands often and well with soap and warm water for a minimum of 20 seconds (hum "Happy Birthday To You" twice) OR use portable alcohol-based hand wash solutions.
- Use good cough hygiene: cover your cough or sneeze with a clean tissue or cough/sneeze into your elbow; throw the used tissue away and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your nose or eyes since this can pass infection.

If you are sick with the symptoms of flu (fever, chills, cough, sore throat and muscle aches):

- Stay home and rest – don't go to school, work, or social events.
- Drink lots of fluids.

- Rather than going to the emergency room, please contact your doctor if you have any concerns. If you do not have a primary care physician, please call 311 – the city service line.

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