

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD

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Department of Health Continues H1N1 Investigation, Preparedness Planning World Health Organization Raises Pandemic Threat Level

(Santa Fe) – Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD, said today that the New Mexico Department of Health is continuing its investigation and preparedness work around the current H1N1 outbreak, with no changes related to the World Health Organization increasing the pandemic alert level.

“We are continuing to look for hospitalized cases of H1N1 influenza while also planning ahead for increased flu activity and potential vaccination clinics this fall, and updating the preparedness plans we have had in place for years,” Dr. Vigil said. “WHO’s pandemic phase designation is based on geographic spread of the influenza virus, and it does not mean there has been a change in the severity of illness. The announcement does remind us to take flu viruses like H1N1 seriously.”

The Department of Health’s Scientific Laboratory in Albuquerque is testing only hospitalized cases of H1N1. There have been six people hospitalized so far in five counties. All patients have recovered. Their age range is from 4 to 72, and they are from Bernalillo, Sierra, Eddy, San Juan and Doña Ana counties.

The illness has been mild so far in New Mexico. Epidemiologists are investigating hospitalized cases and any clusters of cases at institutional settings like long-term care facilities. So far, there have been no clusters.

Twenty-two clinics across New Mexico are reporting weekly on the percent of patient visits with influenza-like illness. The Department is not tracking or reporting every case of H1N1. Nationally and in New Mexico, health officials expect there are many more cases of H1N1 than reported because sick people do not necessarily see a physician, and those who do are not always tested for influenza. During New Mexico’s typical influenza season, 55 clinics and laboratories report influenza-like illness to the Department from October to May.

“We always recommend that people wash their hands frequently, cover their cough with a tissue or their arm and stay home when they are sick,” Dr. Vigil said.

For national information on H1N1, look up CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.