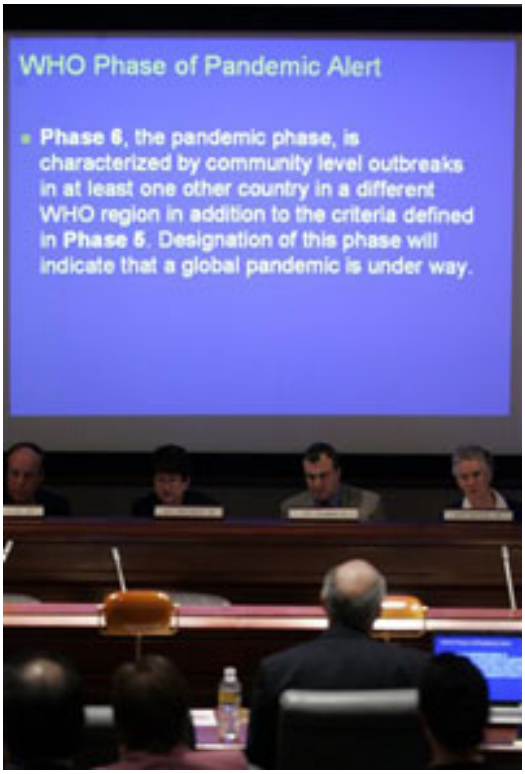
Flu Alert Level Kept At Phase 5



Connecticut chief epidemiologist Matt Cartter, second from right with back to camera, testifies before the legislature's Public Health Committee and the Public Safety and Security Committee at a forum held at the Legislative office building in Hartford, Conn., Thursday, April 30, 2009. The World Health Organization (WHO) says there are now no new indications in the swine flu outbreak that would prompt the U.N. body to raise the global alert level to the maximum or Phase 6. The forum was held to brief legislators on the swine flu outbreak. (AP Photo/Bob Child)

GENEVA, May 18 (Kyodo) —The World Health Organization chief said Monday the U.N. health body will keep the alert against a new strain of influenza at phase 5.

WHO Director General Margaret Chan said the new influenza epidemic is now in "a grace period."

The WHO chief made the decision as the world health body's annual general assembly began earlier Monday in Geneva with the central focus on how the international community can work together over measures to stop worldwide spread of the new flu and securing vaccines against it.

Chan earlier told the general assembly the global community needs to remain alert on the new influenza as nobody can predict how the virus could mix with other flu strains and become a variable with a different severity.

With the number of Japan's domestic infections quickly rising, some had believed the WHO could even raise its alert against the new H1N1 strain of influenza A to phase 6, a state of pandemic, during the five-day meeting if it decides the infections are persistent in countries outside of North America as well.

On the first day of the general meeting where WHO chief Chan and other WHO executives as well as health ministers and ministerial-level officials from the WHO's 193 member states are attending, Japan and Britain urged the WHO to review its current alert system, which considers only how fast the disease is spreading.

British Health Secretary Alan Johnson proposed the influenza's severity be also considered when the WHO decides whether to raise the current level to the pandemic 6 phase. "We need to give you and your team more flexibility as to whether we move to phase 6."

Delegates from Japan, New Zealand and China supported the proposal.

Taiwan, as an observer, is also participating in the meeting for the first time since it was ousted from the United Nations in 1971, reflecting the improvement in China-Taiwan relationship.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon is scheduled to meet Tuesday with leaders of the world's pharmaceutical industry and ask them to secure vaccines against the new flu.

On a global level, about 9,800 people in 41 countries and regions had been confirmed infected with the new flu as of early Tuesday Japan time, including 76 who have died.

The U.N. health body raised the alert level to phase 4 on April 27 and phase 5 on April 29.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/10/2014 - 12:31am*):

http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com/product-releases/2009/05/flu-alert-level-kept-phase-5