

H1N1 Is Still Spreading Globally

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WASHINGTON — President [Barack Obama](#) has declared the [swine flu](#) outbreak a national emergency, allowing [hospitals](#) and local governments to speedily set up alternate sites for treatment and triage of any surge of patients, the White House said.

The declaration Saturday did not signify any unanticipated worsening in the United States of the H1N1 outbreak, officials said. It seemed likely, however, to increase concerns, disruptions and at times, panicky reactions, to a disease now affecting most parts of the world.

At some vaccination sites people have stood in line through the night; hundreds have been turned away. On Chicago's North Side, Mary Kate Merna, 28, a teacher, arrived too late. "I thought I'd be a priority, being nine months pregnant," she said. "You hear it's a national emergency and it scares you."

On Sunday, swine flu reached high into the sporting world, delaying a key French soccer match in Marseille. The game between rivals Paris Saint-Germain and the Olympique de Marseille was postponed after a third player on the Paris team was diagnosed with the H1N1 virus. The cancellation was announced hours before the match at the 60,000-seat Stade Velodrome.

The disease continued to spread rapidly in parts of the Northern Hemisphere, though it has slowed in much of the Southern Hemisphere. Worldwide, the swine flu has claimed nearly 5,000 lives, according to the [World Health Organization](#). U.S. officials say more than 1,000 Americans have died because of it.

Morocco recently closed schools for the first time, when 10 students contracted [the flu](#). Turkey reported its first fatal case of H1N1, that of a 29-year-old in Ankara. Iceland had its first swine-flu death last week. Mongolia and Rwanda reported their first cases.

Thousands of Americans have lined up for [vaccinations](#), even as federal officials acknowledged that their ambitious vaccination program has gotten off to a slow start. Only 16 million doses of the vaccine are available now, and about 30 million were expected by the end of the month. Some states have requested 10 times the amount allotted.

Flu activity — virtually all of it the swine flu — is now widespread in 46 states, a level equaling the peak of a typical winter flu season. Millions of people in the United States have had swine flu either in the first wave in the spring or the current wave.

Amid growing fears, traditional [Halloween](#) parties, school events and birthday parties have been canceled. Reactions have at times bordered on the panicky.

U.S. officials sought to calm undue fears, emphasizing that Mr. Obama's emergency declaration was largely an administrative move, clearing the way for hospitals in danger of being overwhelmed with swine flu patients to execute disaster plans that include transferring patients to satellite facilities or other hospitals. The officials said it had nothing to do with vaccine shortages.

New York State last week suspended a vaccination requirement for health workers, citing a vaccine shortage, and urged children and pregnant women to get shots first. Other vaccination programs across the country have reported long lines — some people have arrived with camping supplies to spend the night — and short supplies.

David Levine, head of the Montreal Health and Social Services Agency, told the Gazette newspaper that he hoped to see 75 percent of the city's population vaccinated within two months, "to create a mass [immunity](#) so the virus has nowhere to go." But supplies there are still short.

Top American flu experts insist that the U.S. shortages are temporary, and local, and that there will be a surplus of vaccine by early next year. That would allow the government to donate tens of millions of doses to poor countries, as it has promised to do.

Although the Paris-Marseille cancellation was the biggest sporting casualty of the flu so far, the disease has hit teams from the professional ranks down through youth leagues.

The flu has hit Cleveland professional sports hard. Nearly one-third the Cavaliers' 20 basketball players were out ill last week. A dozen members of the Browns football team missed some practice.

Since last winter's more isolated cases, the expectation that the virus would return with a vengeance has posed a test of the Obama administration. Officials are mindful that the previous administration's failure to better prepare for and respond to [Hurricane Katrina](#) in 2005 left doubts that dogged President [George W. Bush](#) to the end of his term.

In Washington, Senator [Mitch McConnell](#) of Kentucky, the minority leader, said on Sunday that if the administration requested additional flu-fighting resources from Congress, "I know we'd be happy to provide it on a totally bipartisan basis," he told ABC's "This Week."

Jackie Calmes reported from Washington, and Donald G. McNeil Jr. from New York. Brian Knowlton in Washington, Crystal Yednak in Chicago and Holli Chmela in Fairfax, Va., contributed reporting.

Because of an editing error, a previous version of this article misstated the number of Paris Saint-Germain soccer players who have contracted swine flu.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/26/health/26H1N1.html?hp>