

Ukraine braced for swine flu outbreak

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Ukraine on Friday shut schools, banned large public gatherings and imposed travel restrictions for three weeks – some of the most drastic measures taken across the globe to contain [swine flu](#) – after confirming that a sudden and swift outbreak has claimed at least 11 lives.

Campaigning for the hotly contested presidential contest in January has also been put off. Observers said the far sweeping moves to combat the flu are partly rooted in the political rivalry between Victor Yushchenko, president, and Yulia Tymoshenko, his prime minister, with each trying to outdo the other and be seen assertively handling the outbreak.

In the latest figures released this weekend, officials said more than 50 died of pneumonia and other suspected H1N1 sicknesses. More than 2,000 people were hospitalised in connection with the “epidemic” that broke out in October in western regions of the country that border the European Union.

Ukraine’s immediate EU neighbours, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia pledged to provide aid after Kiev appealed for international assistance. This weekend, [World Health Organisation](#) officials announced a visit to Ukraine to help determine the severity of the outbreak.

Fourteen cases of H1N1 have been confirmed thus far, a sharp rise from the first two infections confirmed this summer. Experts had warned that the recession-battered country, with its dilapidated and under-financed hospitals, would struggle to contain an outbreak.

On Friday, Mr Yushchenko said that 11 people were “confirmed to have died from swine flu”.

In a panic, many citizens flocked to pharmacies seeking to purchase medication and masks. Existing stocks quickly sold out fast sparking panic and anger at the government.

Earlier on Friday, Ms Tymoshenko warned that licences would be evoked for pharmacies that were caught overcharging for medication

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