

Thousands in Asia-Pacific sprint to fight H1N1 – UN



The A(H1N1) situation needs to be carefully monitored

31 October 2009 – Some 11,000 people have taken part in today's United Nations running festival in Bangkok, Thailand, to raise awareness of the need to curb the spread of the H1N1 flu pandemic.

Over 400,000 confirmed cases and 5,000 deaths from H1N1 flu have been reported to the UN World Health Organization (**WHO**) as of last week, but the actual number of cases is much higher since authorities in many countries have stopped counting individual cases, Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**), **said**.

"The spread of this disease underscores the importance of ensuring a healthy balanced life style, something that Thailand is known for, as well as ensuring access to health and social services for all," she said at the UN Day Run, whose theme this year is "Unite to Fight H1N1."

Diseases, she emphasized, know no boundaries. "But they can be stopped by awareness and education campaigns, healthy communities and affordable health care."

Today's event also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the UN being based in Thailand. Currently, 31 UN organizations are based in the Thai capital.

"The UN works around the world to make development more caring of our planet and more inclusive for our people," Ms. Heyzer stressed.

The WHO's latest recommendations call for single doses of H1N1 flu vaccine for adults, adolescents starting at age 10, and pregnant women.

The agency said that the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization, which advises it on vaccine policy and strategy, recommended further studies in children older than six months and younger than 10 years, since the data are limited.

For pregnant women, SAGE noted that studies in experimental animals using live attenuated or inactivated vaccines found no evidence of direct or indirect harmful effects on fertility, pregnancy, foetal development, birthing or post-natal development.

"Based on these data and the substantially elevated risk for a severe outcome in pregnant women infected with the pandemic virus, SAGE recommended that any licensed vaccine can be used in pregnant women, provided no specific contraindication has been identified by the [national] regulatory authority," WHO said in its **update**.

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