



EMS SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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Pandemic Alert Phase 4: Implications for Fire/EMS

The World Health Organization (WHO) uses pandemic phases 1 through 6 to categorize disease spread and set public health goals. Phase 4 is the mid phase in the pandemic alerting process and means that scientific assessment has determined that there are small clusters of infection with limited human-to-human spread, all highly localized suggesting that the virus is not adapting well to humans. The implications affect public health agencies and governments, not Fire/EMS or civilians.

The overarching public health goal at Phase 4 is to transition from Phase 3 efforts attempting to identify the virus, early detection of new cases, and treatment of those infected to a more concentrated effort at containing or delaying spread to afford time for ramping up preparedness measures including development of vaccines. In the United States and Canada, Phase 4 activities were well underway before the WHO raised their pandemic alert level.

As the hype over swine flu increases, Fire/EMS can play an important role as public health partners in educating patients and community members about signs and symptoms of influenza. We also need to encourage the public to use the same common sense precautions to prevent illness as they would with a seasonal flu: stay home when you are ill, cover your mouth when you cough, and wash your hands often.

Decisions by WHO on lowering or raising their pandemic alert are based on careful risk assessment, virus spread, and severity of illness.

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