



EMS SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

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Pandemic Alert **Phase 5**: 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 5 is the upper end of the pandemic alerting period and means that scientific assessment has found larger clusters of infection with human-to-human spread that remains localized, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans but may not yet be fully transmissible. Like Phase 4, the implications largely affect public health agencies and governments, not Fire/EMS or civilians.

The priority public health goal at Phase 5 is to step up efforts to contain and delay spread of the virus. The United States and Canadian governments have been extremely proactive in their efforts to meet this public health goal.

The media has created such significant concern over the H1N1 virus that citizens are becoming needlessly alarmed. Fire/EMS leaders should take every opportunity to assure their members that H1N1 is no different from seasonal influenza. EMS providers and the public should continue to use common sense measures to prevent spread of illness. Influenza is a serious seasonal disease that infects millions of Americans every year. The CDC estimates that 36,000 people died from flu-related causes each year, on the average, during the 1990s in the U.S.

The 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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