

Information supplied by Government of Canada Operations Center:

The WHO's six stages of alert for pandemic preparedness

The six phases of the World Health Organization's pandemic-preparedness system:

PHASE 1: In nature, influenza viruses circulate continuously among animals, especially birds. No viruses circulating among animals have been reported to cause infections in humans.

PHASE 2: An animal influenza virus circulating among domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans, and is therefore considered a potential pandemic threat.

PHASE 3: An animal or human-animal influenza virus has caused sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human-to-human transmission sufficient to sustain community-level outbreaks. Limited human-to-human transmission possible.

PHASE 4: Verified human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza virus able to cause "community-level outbreaks." The ability to cause sustained disease outbreaks in a community marks a significant upwards shift in the risk for a pandemic. Indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion.

PHASE 5: Human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.

PHASE 6: the pandemic phase, characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region in addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5. Indicates a global pandemic underway.

POST-PEAK: Pandemic disease levels in most countries with adequate surveillance drop below peak observed levels. Pandemic activity appears to be decreasing, but additional waves of the disease possible. Previous pandemics have been characterized by waves of activity spread over months.

POST-PANDEMIC: Influenza disease activity returns to levels normally seen for seasonal influenza. Maintain surveillance and update pandemic preparedness and response plans accordingly. An intensive phase of recovery and evaluation may be required.