

Flu stories traveling faster than flu itself

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, April 30, 2009

[Russia Today](#) 29 April 2009

Region: [USA](#)

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In-depth Report: [THE H1N1 SWINE FLU PANDEMIC](#)

The latest global health scare, swine flu, is spreading, bringing a wave of panic in its wake. But experts are playing down the threat, saying the world has never been better prepared for a pandemic.

At the epicenter of the outbreak, in Mexico, 2,500 people are suspected of carrying the virus. Doctors have confirmed only 49 cases. Seven of those have died.

In the US, 65 people are infected with swine flu and a two-year-old child in Texas is reported to have died from it.

Roughly two dozen people have been diagnosed with swine flu across the world. So far, nine nations have confirmed cases of infection.

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To date, Russia has no confirmed cases of swine flu. The authorities have imposed a ban on pig imports and are screening people at airports for influenza-like symptoms such as high temperatures.

Authorities around the globe are giving assurances there's no need to panic when it comes to swine flu but fears of a pandemic seem to be spreading faster than the virus itself.

The modern world hasn't experienced a pandemic like the Spanish flu outbreak at the beginning of the 20th century, which killed up to 40 million people.

In recent years the deadliest flu strain has been bird flu, which kills more than 60% of those who catch it. To date it has only killed around 250 people worldwide.

So far the World Health Organisation has not suggested imposing travel restrictions to stop the virus spreading. Also the death rates for the outbreak are relatively low - 2.5% as compared to 17% for SARS or 61% for the infamous H5N1 bird flu.

"Flu is a serious illness itself and the CDC, the Centre for Flu Control, reports about 37,000 flu-related deaths in the US every year," Dr Simon Matskeplishvili says.

But humanity seems to quickly embrace apocalyptic scenarios and swine flu is expected by many to be the next global serial killer. These expectations at times lead to overreaction.

In 1976 a single case of swine flu death in the US resulted in rushed measures. After five

soldiers fell ill at Fort Dix and one died, around \$135 million was spent on vaccination. Up to 40 million people took it – and at least 25 died from side effects. There was no outbreak and it cost President Ford his re-election.

Today, governments are allocating billions to stem the threat. The World Bank has provided Mexico with a \$200 million emergency loan and the US is pouring money into their virus defences.

And the media loosely uses terms like “outbreak” and “pandemic”.

“The day it was called ‘the pandemic’, the financial markets reacted with a sharp drop in pork stocks. People started investing more in gold and currency – the US dollar and Japanese yen. Shares in pharmaceuticals skyrocketed. But worries soon calmed as it became clear the situation is under control,” Aleksandr Potavin said, ‘IT Invest’ expert.

Meanwhile, many experts agree that despite the potential danger of the virus, it’s far too early to call it a “pandemic”.

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