

TALKING POINTS ON LEVEL SIX

The WHO - World Health Organization - may have changed what they are calling the current H1N1 outbreak but nothing has changed in this country in terms of the Administration's response.

Our goal since the outbreak began has been to try and step one step ahead of this unpredictable virus and do the planning and preparation necessary to keep Americans safe and secure.

We have been preparing for a pandemic and been implementing our pandemic response plan for the past few weeks here in this country - sending anti-virals to the states, beginning the work necessary to produce a vaccine, working with state and local officials on community mitigation strategies and monitoring and tracking the virus around the country,

The change in the WHO pandemic alert level to phase 6, will have little impact on our response in the United States. From the beginning, we have assumed an aggressive public health approach to this outbreak.

Although the virus continues to spread to other countries, the disease continues to be a mild one for the most part. Health Officials are not seeing significant changes in the virus in samples from various countries.

The WHO pandemic phase designation is based on geographic spread of the influenza virus, not on the severity of the illness.

Today's WHO announcement should be an alert to countries in the southern hemisphere that the virus is likely present and health authorities should heighten their surveillance activities and review their pandemic plans.

Here in the US, we are working hard across the government to be prepared for what happens in the fall with H1N1 when the traditional flu season starts. We are preparing to have a vaccine tested and ready to go should the science determine we need to begin an immunization campaign.

