

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 11, 2009

For More Information Contact

Phil Giaramita, (804) 864-7008

PANDEMIC DECLARATION MEANS VIRGINIANS NEED TO REMAIN VIGILANT IN H1N1 RESPONSE

(RICHMOND, Va.)— Earlier today, the World Health Organization raised its influenza pandemic alert from Phase 5 to Phase 6, reporting that confirmed cases of the novel Influenza A (H1N1) virus have now been found in 74 countries. In most countries, according to the WHO, the increase in cases can be attributed to “good surveillance and testing.”

In Virginia, State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA, said the WHO’s action was not unexpected. “This change means that the H1N1 virus has reached more parts of the world and is an indication of how easily the virus is spread from person to person,” Commissioner Remley said. “Today’s declaration does not change the nature of the virus’ severity, which remains mild in Virginia, nor does it indicate any change in the behavior of the virus.”

What the declaration does mean for Virginians, the Commissioner said, is the need to remain vigilant against the spread of the disease. “We are focused on monitoring the activity of the virus in our state and on reducing its impact, especially among those at highest risk for complications,” Commissioner Remley said. The state has reported 84 confirmed cases of H1N1 virus, with relatively few hospitalizations and one death of a person who had the infection. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported 13,200 confirmed cases, approximately 1,000 hospitalizations and 27 deaths.

The state continues to concentrate its testing protocol on those members of the population who are at highest risk for complications from the virus. These include people who are hospitalized with influenza-like illness, people with underlying chronic health conditions, pregnant women, the elderly and the very young.

People with influenza-like symptoms that include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, fatigue and body aches should:

- stay home from work or school and limit their contact with others to keep from spreading the virus
- cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze and to throw the tissue in the trash
- wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. Use of alcohol-based hand cleaners also is effective.

- limit close contact with sick people
- prevent the spread of germs by not touching their eyes, nose or mouth
- call their health care provider if they have questions or concerns

###