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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

RP emergency plan readied vs flu

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quarantine measures to ensure that travelers to the Philippines, especially from Mexico, the US and other European countries, are monitored.

He said incoming passengers exhibiting flu-like symptoms would be immediately quarantined. He said state-of-the-art scanning monitors would be used in ports and airports.

He said the government is also ensuring adequate supply of N95 masks for frontline health workers, who would also be provided with other forms of protection.

Unfair label

The government is preparing various measures to deal with the potential threat of swine flu even as the Department of Agriculture (DA) insisted that the suspect virus is unfairly being labeled as swine flu when there is still no concrete evidence that it had been sparked by an outbreak in the hog sector.

In a press conference, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap argued that the swine flu outbreak in Mexico, the United States and Canada is a human health issue rather than an animal health issue.

The unfairly labeled swine flu, Yap clarified, has been identified by the World Organization for Animal Health as a multi-strain virus that includes human, avian and swine components.

Yap said that according to the international agency, the virus should be more appropriately labeled as the "North American influenza."

Import ban stays

The Department of Agriculture said it will continue to temporarily suspend pork imports from affected areas in Mexico, the United States and Canada.

Also last April 28, the department revealed that it is closely monitoring reports of incidences of this new influenza strain in France, New Zealand, South Korea, and Spain to find out if there is a need to expand the temporary suspension of pork imports from these areas.

The temporary ban, Yap clarified, would cover only specific areas and not the entire US, Canada and Mexico.

The Philippines does not import pork from Mexico but imports about 20,000 metric tons from the US and about the same amount from Canada, for a total of about 50,000 MT.

However, the pork exports from the US and Canada, Yap clarified, are not fresh meat but are used for processed food manufacturing.

Yap said the Philippines will maintain the import ban as a precautionary measure despite the latest pronouncement by the World Organization for Animal Health that "there is no evidence that this virus is transmitted by food."

Strict inspection

Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza has ordered all officials of airport and port authorities in the Philippines to implement strict inspection of passengers through thermal scanners to prevent the entry of swine flu into the country.

Mendoza also authorized the purchase of all other needed equipment to ferret out possible carriers of the H1N1 strain of the deadly swine flu virus.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) also said that it would beef up the inspection of ships before they are allowed to dock. ■

The bottom-line you need to know about swine flu

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hands. Flu viruses can live on surfaces for several hours, like a doorknob just touched by someone who sneezed into his hand.

Q: Is it treatable?

A: Yes, with the flu drugs Tamiflu or Relenza, but not with two older flu medications.

Q: Why are people dying in Mexico and not here?

A: That's a huge mystery. First, understand that no one really knows just how many people in Mexico are dying of this flu strain, or how many have it. Only a fraction of the suspected deaths have been tested and confirmed as swine flu, and some initially suspected cases were caused by something else.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: They're similar to regular human flu—a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting.

Q: How do I know if I should see a doctor?

A: Health authorities say if you live in places where swine flu cases have been confirmed, or you recently traveled to Mexico, and you have those symptoms, your doctor can decide whether you need treatment or to be tested.

Q: Did last winter's flu shot protect me?

A: Probably not. Even though it did protect against the Type A family of flu viruses that this new

swine flu belongs to, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ran some preliminary tests and doesn't think it offered any cross protection.

Q: Why are people calling it swine flu if it's not just from pigs? Did it really come from pigs?

A: Pigs do spread their own strains of influenza and every so often people catch one, usually after contact with the animals. This new virus is a mix of human, pig and bird viruses but the name, for ease, was shortened to swine flu—and unlike typical swine flu, it is spreading person-to-person.

Q: So is it safe to eat pork?

A: Yes. Swine influenza viruses don't spread through food. (AP)



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