

Woman tested for A(H1N1) flu in Iloilo

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Inquirer.net

ILOILO CITY—The Department of Health (DoH) has placed under observation a 64-year-old woman for suspected Influenza A(H1N1) infection when she exhibited flu symptoms after coming home from the United States.

The woman, a United States immigrant, was brought to the Western Visayas Medical Center (WVMC) here from Aklan province on Sunday after she developed fever, cough, and sore throat, said Doctor

Ariel Valencia, DoH director for Western Visayas

It was the first suspected A(H1N1) case in Western Visayas region, he said.

The patient was quarantined at the WVMC while waiting for results of laboratory tests, which were done at the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) in Manila, he said.

The patient was given the anti-flu Tamiflu vaccine. Her fever had gone down, which was

a positive sign, Valencia said

The woman arrived from California on May 12 and proceeded to Aklan. She exhibited flu symptoms four days later, which prompted her family to bring her to the WVMC.

California has 553 probable and confirmed cases of A(H1N1) infection as of May 18, according to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Five deaths due to the infection have been reported in the US. ■

Swine flu vaccine out soon

GENEVA, Switzerland—Swiss drug maker Novartis last May 19 said it has received samples of the swine flu A(H1N1) virus and is awaiting the World Health Organization (WHO)'s go-ahead to begin producing a vaccine.

"We have received the virus and our researchers have started looking into modifying it so we can begin producing a vaccine," said a spokesman who added that it would take three to four weeks to get up and running.

"We are waiting for the green light from the WHO and the CDC (the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)," the spokesman said.

Novartis already produces a vaccine against seasonal flu but now has to work out what priority to give to production demands for each vaccine, given potentially different needs for the northern and southern hemispheres, he added.

Meantime, the production of 4.9 billion doses of a swine flu vaccine a year would be possible, according to an extract of a WHO forecast presented to vaccine makers that was seen by AFP.

The WHO is counting on output of 94.3 million doses a week if full-scale production is launched, according to a presentation made to pharmaceutical companies at a meeting here.

In the Philippines, the 11-month-old Japanese infant reported on Monday to have flu-like symptoms has tested negative for the virus.

The Department of Health (DOH) reported that since May 1, a total of 68 travelers have been registered with fever.

Of the 68 cases, three are still undergoing observation, pending the results of their laboratory tests.

One of them is a 67-year-old Filipino male who arrived from Japan last May 10.

The two others are a 37-year-old male foreigner who arrived from the United States last May 11 and a 32-year-old female foreigner who arrived from India last May 12.

As this developed, the DOH said it does not intend to expand the anti-Influenza A(H1N1)

surveillance system in international airports and seaports although the virus is getting closer to the Philippines.

DOH Undersecretary Mario Villaverde said the preparedness activities of the Philippines are generally adequate.

"Procedures are in place. Some are saying that we don't have an effective monitoring system, but the Philippines has zero case and that is very important to us," Villaverde said.

He added that if a traveler from a country with confirmed A(H1N1) cases did not have fever when he passed through the thermal scanner but eventually develops the symptom, all hospitals in the country have already been advised to report such case to the DOH.

Meantime, officials of tourist destinations nationwide are on the lookout for foreign and local travelers who might be infected with the potentially fatal A(H1N1) virus, the Department of Tourism reported last May 19.

Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano said all regional tourism units have been instructed to stay vigilant and coordinate closely with concerned government agencies in monitoring A(H1N1) cases among tourists.

The DOT is also urging local tourists to travel to domestic destinations instead of going abroad in light of the current situation.

The government is closely screening all inbound travelers in six international airports with thermal scanners to detect body temperatures.

Special isolation areas have also been put up in these airports to quarantine travelers exhibiting flu symptoms, especially those coming from places with reported cases of the virus.

Tighter security has also been implemented in entry seaports and other airports servicing chartered flights.

Durano said despite the threat of A(H1N1), there are no cancellations of tour packages to the country.

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Favila says exports starting to pick up

AFTER recording a 52 percent drop in investments for the first three months of the year, the government announced that second quarter investments would be better as a South Korean firm finalizes its plan to invest in the country's renewable energy industry.

"Things started picking up," Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Peter B. Favila told reporters last May 19 afternoon. He said the signs are very encouraging.

In fact, exports are starting to pick up. "Exports have bottomed out," Favila said.

According to him food and furniture exporters have started recovering the lost orders they suffered when the global demand started slowing down.

Most importantly, Favila noted that the electronics industry is gaining ground again. "This is good news because this is our number one export," Favila added.

Aside from the export industry,



DTI Secretary Peter B. Favila

drivers for growth in the second quarter investments are tourism and the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector.

Favila disclosed that he will be visiting Korea soon where he will meet with a Korean firm that has expressed interest in investing in the country's renewable energy sector.

Favila said the firm has partnered with a local company. More details are expected as soon as the deal is finalized.

The global crisis has adversely affected the investing climate in the Philippines as approvals for the first quarter of the year decreased by 52 percent. DTI Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez reported that investments approvals of the two attached agencies of DTI amounted to P17.98 billion, 52 percent lower than the P37 billion recorded in the same period the previous year.

The Board of Investments (BOI) had P4.3 billion worth of investment for the first three months of the year, down 57 percent from last year's P9.3 billion. The Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) on the other hand, recorded P13.7 billion worth of investment approvals or 51 percent lower than the P27.7 billion during the same period in 2008.

This year, domestic investors tried to make up for the slack left by foreigners as more local firms infused money in the country.

Foreign investment approvals went down by 80 percent in the first quarter of 2009 compared to the same period a year ago. Foreigners contributed only P3.9 billion compared to P19.8 billion last year. (Philstar.com)

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