

## Influenza A(H1N1): World Bank to 'Fast-Track' US \$ 500 Million to Help Countries Better Prepare for Pandemic Flu

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**Washington, June 2, 2009**—The World Bank today approved 'fast-track' status for US \$500 million dollars to help countries finance emergency operations to prevent and control outbreaks of Influenza A(H1N1).

The money will top up an existing US \$500 million credit line— the Global Program for Avian Influenza Control and Human Pandemic Preparedness and Response (GPAI)—set up in January 2006 to minimize the threat posed to people by the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus H5N1, especially in the poorest countries. Fifty-seven countries used the GPAI to finance avian influenza control and human pandemic preparedness operations with a total commitment value of US \$421 million.

The Bank's decision today will expand the GPAI to allow the Bank to 'fast-track' emergency H1N1 financing to low, and middle-income countries to buy drugs, medical equipment and supplies, to pay for hospital care and public information campaigns, to strengthen human and livestock health surveillance, and help to blunt the economic and social costs associated with pandemic flu.

"This is a particularly bad time for a pandemic to occur given that developing countries are more vulnerable now because of the compounded effects of the food, fuel and financial crises," says **Jeff Gutman, the World Bank's Vice President for Operations**. "The worst-case scenarios for pandemic flu point to a significant economic impact, with poor people in developing countries likely to be hit hardest. The potential impact would be felt well beyond the health sector, as Mexico's recent experience showed. In light of the uncertainties surrounding the future spread and severity of flu outbreaks, we feel that it is important to provide countries with rapid support to respond to pandemic threats, and to build up their capacity to prevent and control zoonotic diseases."

*The World Bank recently mobilized more than US \$205 million in 'fast-track' funds to Mexico to help it fight the spread of influenza H1N1 with US \$25 million for drugs and supplies and another US \$180 million for disease surveillance, laboratory testing, and other operational activities.*

Gutman says the Bank will also provide countries with the latest evidence and lessons learned from previous emergency responses such as SARS, avian influenza, and post-disaster reconstruction after the 2004 Asian tsunami, to help them with their pandemic flu contingency plans, while also working to strengthen their human and animal health systems.

Global coordination is also key to successful containment of H1N1 says Gutman. The Bank's pandemic flu work continues to build on the extensive global teamwork set up during the avian flu outbreak with FAO, WHO, OIE, EC, bilateral agencies, and other development partners.

### Stronger health systems essential to fight H1N1

As of today, 62 countries have officially reported over 17,000 cases of influenza H1N1 infection, including 115 deaths. H1N1 outbreaks have mostly been limited to countries with strong health systems which are responding effectively. However, the Bank cautions that a significant pandemic risk remains and that

many developing countries are not currently well-prepared to confront a potential pandemic, either in terms of their contingency plans, their ability to access medicines and vaccines, or the strength of their health systems.

“The H1N1 virus outbreak has reinforced the need for stronger health systems, especially in poorer countries, which is why health systems strengthening is the bedrock of the World Bank’s health, nutrition, and population work,” says **Rakesh Nangia, the World Bank’s Operations and Strategy Director for Human Development, and its H1N1 Coordinator**. “Strong health systems are vital at all stages in pandemic response, from detection and confirmation of cases to providing care, treatment and advice to those affected. Under the current circumstances, the world cannot afford to drop its guard.”

Nangia says that the Bank is working with WHO and other global and regional partners to identify countries which could potentially need H1N1 financing under the pandemic flu global credit line. Low-income countries seeking H1N1 financial help would qualify for the Bank’s zero-interest concessional lending, under the [International Development Association \(IDA\)](#).

Even before the H1N1 outbreaks in Mexico, the World Bank had [warned developing and middle income countries and their aid donors not to cut back on their essential health services because of the global financial crisis](#). Nangia says that previous financial crises in East Asia and elsewhere had forced developing countries to cut back on health spending, and that these had lead to increased anemia in pregnant women, micro-nutrient deficiencies (especially vitamin A) in children, and low average weight for children under the age of three.

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