

Influenza

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PRAGUE, Czech Republic - The Czech Republic's health minister says authorities are reducing an order for swine flu vaccine shots by 300,000 due to a lack of interest among people to get vaccinated.

The country had planned to vaccinate about 1 million people in high-risk groups, including people with chronic diseases, health workers, soldiers and pregnant women. Ask for the real philodendron to stand up and you might be surprised at one plant that does not rise: the split-leaf philodendron, sometimes called Swiss cheese plant. Split-leaf philodendron is a philodendron look-alike, with smooth, glossy leaves and brown roots dangling from the stems like thick cords. Like a real philodendron, it also has a hardy disposition, tolerating low light, dry air and neglectful watering as well as any other good houseplant.

JERUSALEM - An Israeli archaeologist says newly excavated ancient fortifications in Jerusalem date back 3,000 years to the time of the Bible's King Solomon. Archaeologist Eilat Mazar says pottery shards date the walls to the 10th century B.C. If she's right, the findings would indicate a strong central government in Jerusalem then because building city walls demanded great resources and organization.

LONDON - The World Health Organization is recommending that swine flu be added to regular flu vaccines next season.

The swine flu pandemic virus, or H1N1, emerged too late last year to be added to the regular flu vaccine, and a separate vaccine was needed. For this year's northern hemisphere flu season, however, the two vaccines should be combined, WHO flu chief Keiji Fukuda said Thursday after the agency met this week to decide which strains should be recommended to drug makers for vaccines.

NEW YORK - A silver taffeta trench coat and a reversible grey one made partially of lacquered cotton are two nice bookends to the Luca Luca story for next season. Designer Raul Melgoza said he wanted to offer a collection of fall clothes at New York Fashion Week that paid homage to "the diverse roles of women in society."

ATLANTA - Swine flu cases are down, but health officials say the disease's cumulative impact has grown to 57 million U.S. illnesses, 257,000 hospitalizations and 11,690 deaths.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the new estimates Friday. They represent cases from the time swine flu was first identified in April through mid-January - the first nine months of the pandemic.

TORONTO - H1N1 influenza landed a higher proportion of Canadians in ICUs and on ventilators, and at a much younger age on average, than seasonal flu does in a typical year, says a report assessing the comparative impact of the pandemic virus.

The study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information compared hospitalization statistics for H1N1 patients between April and December to data for patients with regular flu during the 2007-2008 season.

OTTAWA - More than half of Ottawa's residents rolled up their sleeves for the H1N1 flu shot.

Medical Officer of Health Dr. Isra Levy estimates 53 per cent of the population have received the vaccine since it was first available at the end of October.

GENEVA - The World Health Organization will hold an expert meeting later this month to consider whether the swine flu pandemic's peak has passed, a senior official said Thursday.

WHO's emergency committee will give its verdict to U.N. health chief Margaret Chan on whether the global outbreak has entered a "transition period," the agency's flu chief Keiji Fukuda said.

ATLANTA - If the U.S. swine flu epidemic isn't over, it certainly looks as if it's on its last legs.

While federal health officials are not ready to declare the threat has passed and the outbreak has run its course, they did report Friday that for the fourth week in a row, no states had widespread flu activity. U.S. cases have been declining since late October.

TORONTO - Canada has revealed what it will do with a portion of the country's large H1N1 vaccine surplus, announcing Thursday that it is giving five million doses to the World Health Organization.

Federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq said Canada would also give the global health agency \$6 million to support its pandemic relief efforts.

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Athletes, officials and tourists in Vancouver for the Olympics are being invited to take home an unusual souvenir from next month's Winter Games - an H1N1 flu shot.

British Columbia's chief medical officer of health says anyone who wants a pandemic flu shot while at the Olympics is welcome to get one.

PRAGUE, Czech Republic - The Czech Republic's president says he is opposing a mandatory vaccination program against swine flu for the Czech military.

Vaclav Klaus says he considers the order of Czech military chief of general staff Lt. Gen. Vlastimil Picek to vaccinate 16,000 soldiers "highly controversial, if not unacceptable."

GENEVA - The World Health Organization has rejected as "irresponsible" allegations that swine flu is a fake pandemic.

WHO also dismissed claims it colluded with drug companies to bring economic benefit to the industry by playing up the danger of the new H1N1 influenza strain.

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Not everyone in Canada wanted an H1N1 shot, but B.C.'s chief medical officer of health says the vaccine was popular among First Nations people in that province.

Dr. Perry Kendall says rates of vaccine uptake ranged from about 71 per cent to a staggering 140 per cent in some B.C. First Nations Communities.

TORONTO - A new study says genetic susceptibility is unlikely to be responsible for increased rates of severe H1N1 cases in aboriginal people.

It has been noted with H1N1 and with earlier pandemics that aboriginal people seemed to be more prone to developing severe illness than non-aboriginals.

MEXICO CITY - Mexico City has started giving swine flu vaccinations at subway stations in an effort to reach more people.

City Health Secretary Armando Ahued says the campaign has begun at the 26 busiest stations and will be extended to markets by the end of the week. He spoke to reporters Tuesday. Mexico City has 300,000 vaccine doses and administered 10,200 at subway stops Monday.

ABUJA, Nigeria - Nigerian health officials are reporting the first swine flu-related death in the West African country.

The Federal Ministry of Health says a 38-year-old woman in Lagos became sick six weeks ago and died on Jan. 5.