

Mexican students return to class

May 11 2009, By KENT KILPATRICK and JUAN CARLOS LLORCA ,
Associated Press Writers



A teacher measures the temperature of a girl as she arrives for her first day of school since the outbreak of swine flu in Mexico City, Monday, May 11, 2009. Scoured and disinfected, most of Mexico's primary schools and kindergartens stood ready to welcome back millions of students Monday after a nationwide shutdown ordered to help put a brake on the spread of swine flu. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)

(AP) -- Millions of children, many wearing surgical masks, returned to scrubbed and disinfected classrooms Monday after a nationwide shutdown to curb the spread of swine flu in Mexico. The worldwide toll of deaths linked to the illness rose to 61.

China, meanwhile, was ramping up efforts to control the disease after a Chinese man who had been studying at the University of Missouri became the mainland's first confirmed swine flu case.

Health authorities in Beijing scrambled to find and quarantine more than 200 people who accompanied him on a flight to China, transmitting messages by radio, television and telephone text asking the passengers to contact officials.

Six of Mexico's 31 states put off reopening schools for a week amid a rise in suspected flu cases in some regions, and a seventh ordered a one-day delay. Some parents were worried about sending their children back so soon.

"Imagine with this disease. What if she gets it?" said Filomena Pena Carriles, lining up outside the Ignacio L. Vallarta elementary school in Mexico City with her 8-year-old daughter Esmeralda, who wore a mask as she waited for teachers to begin checking each of the 135 students for [flu symptoms](#).

The school suspended gym classes and all ceremonies for at least a week as an added precaution, said Maria Magdalena Ruiz, a teacher.

Officials said any students with symptom sent home. They also washed hands of students with sanitizing gel.

While Mexicans are feeling a little more relaxed, the swine flu outbreak is continuing to spread around the globe, with international health authorities reporting more than 4,700 confirmed cases in 30 nations. There are 61 deaths tied to the virus - 56 in Mexico, three in the U.S., one in Canada and one in Costa Rica.

Mexico Health Secretary Jose Angel Cordova announced Monday that weekend tests on backlogged samples caused officials to raise their confirmed death toll from 48.

The United States now has the most confirmed cases - 2,532 in 44 states

- according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mexico has confirmed 2,003 cases.

In Mexico, crews worked through the weekend to cleanse school buildings and stock them with sanitary supplies as 25 million children prepared to resume their studies after authorities ordered schools closed in the Mexico City region on April 24 and then the whole country three days later.

The federal Education Department said Sunday that 88.9 percent of the nation's estimated 250,000 schools had been cleaned and disinfected.

Secretary of Public Education Alonso Lujambio urged parents not to send their children back to school if they were sick and told teachers to be on guard for possible swine flu cases.

"School life will return to normal as long as the safeguards we have put in place are effective. Help us in this," Lujambio said.

Mexican health officials say swine flu has been confirmed in 1,626 people, of whom 48 have died.

Because of new suspected cases, the states of Jalisco, Hidalgo, Guerrero, San Luis Potosi, Chiapas and Zacatecas postponed the resumption of classes until May 18. Michoacan said its schools would reopen Tuesday. Some towns in Nayarit also kept students home.

High schools and universities restarted last Thursday.

The reopening of kindergartens and primary schools is the latest step in Mexico's efforts to restore a sense of normality after the flu scare. Businesses, restaurants and bars gradually resumed operations over the past week, and except for public servants and restaurant workers, it is

less and less common to see people wearing [surgical masks](#).

The blow to tourism and production has been severe, however. Mexico's Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa told the Spanish daily ABC that the crisis could cost her country 1 percent of gross domestic product this year.

Meanwhile, the government ratcheted up complaints about China's treatment of Mexican citizens because of the swine [flu outbreak](#)

Officials said the country would not participate in a Shanghai trade fair May 19-21 as planned because China had withdrawn Mexico's "guest of honor" status. Thirty Mexican companies had been scheduled to take part.

Mexican officials were already angry over China's quarantining of dozens of Mexican travelers, airline flight cancellations and a ban on its pork products - moves that were part of a wider series of snubs by many nations that has left Mexico feeling unfairly singled out.

China has defended the steps as necessary to keep [swine flu](#) out of the world's most populous nation.

Mexico said Sunday that 13 Mexicans remained in quarantine in China and one in Singapore. Last week Mexico chartered a flight to bring home dozens of its citizens from China. It was unclear if the 14 mentioned Sunday had been placed under restrictions in China since the first group was brought home.

Alexandra Olson in Mexico City contributed to this report.

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