

US swine flu deaths hit double-digits

May 21 2009, By MIKE STARK , Associated Press Writer



Japanese students wear facial masks as a precaution against swine flu while touring the Senso-ji temple area, one of tourists destinations in downtown Tokyo on Thursday May 21, 2008, a day after a 16-year-old girl in Tokyo was confirmed to have swine flu _ the first case in the Japanese capital. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

(AP) -- Swine flu forced Christina Huitron to make a choice no mother should ever have to make.

On Wednesday she told doctors to take her 21-year-old son off life support, making Marcos Sanchez the nation's 10th [fatality](#) associated with the newly discovered virus that continues to spread across the globe.

"I knew he was suffering," Christina Huitron told KSL-TV. "I don't

know how he was feeling, but I just knew I had to do it because he was passing away slowly anyways, and I didn't want him to suffer anymore."

Sanchez checked into a suburban hospital Saturday, vomiting blood and burning with fever, Huitron told The Salt Lake Tribune. By Tuesday he was suffering from multiple [organ failure](#).

Dr. David Sundwall, executive director of the Utah Department of Health, said the state's first swine flu fatality was overweight and had chronic medical conditions, including respiratory problems, that put him at risk.

"This is not a person who was overall genuinely healthy," Sundwall said.

Sanchez had not traveled recently. Dagmar Vitek, medical director for the Salt Lake Valley Health Department, said an investigation to determine how he contracted the virus was under way. Utah has 122 confirmed cases of the virus.

In neighboring Arizona, [health officials](#) said Wednesday a 13-year-old boy from Tucson also has died with swine flu. The teenager died Friday of complications from the flu. He had been hospitalized May 10.

Arizona Department of Health Services spokeswoman Patti Woodcock said an older sibling of the teen is hospitalized with the virus, while other family members have recovered.

Swine flu has sickened more than 11,000 people in 41 countries and killed 85, according to the [World Health Organization](#), whose figures often lag those of individual countries. Mexico has reported 75 deaths, the U.S. 10, and one in both Canada and Costa Rica.

In New York City, officials, colleagues, friends and family gathered

Wednesday at a funeral home to remember Mitchell Wiener, an 55-year-old assistant principal who died of swine flu Sunday.

"Whenever I needed help, I used to always go to him," student Jeffery Grey told reporters outside the funeral home. "I really don't know who to go to now when I need help."

Two more New York City public schools closed amid swine flu fears, bringing the number of city public and private schools shuttered within the last week to 23. Four schools in Lodi, Wis., and one in both Fort Lee, N.J., and Reno, Nev., were also closed Thursday after students were sickened.

Judy Davis, a spokeswoman for the Washoe County District Health Department in Nevada, said state, county and school officials agreed that closing Mendive Middle School in Sparks was "best course of action" to prevent further spread of the flu after five students were sickened and one was hospitalized.

But experts said closing schools once students were already ill would do little to halt the virus' seemingly inexorable spread.

"As a disease containment measure, it is not likely to be effective," said Dr. Paul Biddinger, associate director of the Center for Public Health Preparedness at the Harvard School of Public Health.

In Japan, two high school girls who recently visited New York for a Model United Nations Conference became Tokyo's first confirmed cases. Japan had 280 total confirmed cases as of Thursday afternoon, making it the world's fourth-most infected country, behind Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.

While Japan's Health and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe urged

citizens to remain calm, Egypt's health minister warned that Egyptians who perform the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca risk being quarantined upon their return.

"It is my job to warn," Hatem el-Gabali said. "I can also open the quarantine and say no one will return to their homes after arriving from Saudi Arabia."

Egyptian officials already have ordered that the country's roughly 300,000 pigs be killed as a preventive measure and have finished off about a third of the job in a couple of weeks.

In Geneva, health campaigners and officials from some poorer nations complained this year's World Health Assembly was neglecting diseases killing millions of people all over the world because of swine flu fears.

"Malaria, drug-resistant tuberculosis - they are killing people every day," said Dr. Sam Zaramba, Uganda's chief medical officer. "If all the emphasis that has been put on swine flu had been put on malaria and TB, we would have made a bigger impact on health."

Discussions were postponed on fighting Chagas disease, a scourge in Latin American countries, and the first-ever WHO resolution addressing hepatitis was dropped from the meeting's agenda.

But WHO spokesman Thomas Abraham said the assembly was still taking on a "broad agenda" that went far beyond [swine flu](#) to deal with improving basic health care and tackling global killers like TB.

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