

# World edges towards official swine flu pandemic

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Health authorities edged towards global swine flu pandemic status Wednesday as the virus wreaked havoc with Australian sports scheduling and Colombia reported its first death.

While critics say the alert system is in need of repair, with the A(H1N1) virus proving milder than other flu strains, experts are watching developments in Australia, Britain, Chile and Japan especially carefully.

The World Health Organisation held talks Wednesday with those countries worst hit, seeking "undisputable" evidence of domestic human transmission, after a senior official said Tuesday its highest, level-six alert level was "very, very close" to being called.

"I can confirm that the DG (director-general) is consulting with the ministries of health of seven or eight of the most affected countries to try to see if there is undisputable evidence of community spread," WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib told AFP.

Since the A(H1N1) virus was first discovered in April, some 74 countries have reported 27,737 cases including 141 deaths to the health agency.

According to the WHO's latest tally of flu cases published Wednesday, Chile reported 1,283 more infections, including one new death, bringing its total caseload to 1,694.

Britain added 109 new infections, bringing its total to 666, while Australia reached 1,224, including 173 new cases. Japan also reported 75 new infections, taking its total to 485.

Fears are greatest in the southern hemisphere, with the onset of its winter season.

Frequent flyers and people in large crowds remain particularly at risk -- indeed Australian Rugby league players could be in and out of quarantine for months, authorities said.

The warning came after Swimming Australia said Tuesday it was shelving this month's Grand Prix in Melbourne.

Friday's National Rugby League game between the Brisbane Broncos and the Canterbury Bulldogs is under threat awaiting test results on Broncos fullback Karmichael Hunt.

Senior WHO official Ian Barr predicted all sport would eventually be hit.

"It won't just be the Broncos or rugby league clubs, it will be all sporting activities that will be compromised or their sporting schedule interrupted," Barr, deputy director of WHO's influenza centre, said on Wednesday.

"The players are all susceptible, especially if they are sitting next to somebody on a plane for a few hours."

Around the world, a 24-year-old woman became the first person in Colombia to die of [swine flu](#).

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, due in Australia for a speaking engagement but detained Sunday, also remained in quarantine in

Shanghai on Wednesday.

China has submitted passengers to temperature checks and at times quarantine at its airports in a bid to stop the spread of swine flu.

Those placed under quarantine have usually been released after a seven-day observation period, but the country's strict control measures have faced foreign criticism.

Egypt, Romania, the Czech Republic and Vietnam national authorities each also reported new infections, while Hong Kong health chiefs signalled the territory's first case of human swine flu where the person had caught the virus within the city.

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