

# Indian health authorities say 700 have died in flu outbreak

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Health authorities were working to ensure remote hospitals in northern and western India had adequate medical supplies for a flu outbreak that has claimed more than 700 lives in 10 weeks.

More than 11,000 cases have been reported since mid-December with most of the cases being reported from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh states.

Federal health minister J.P. Nadda asked people to remain alert and not panic as the numbers climbed. At a meeting Thursday, top health officials were told to ensure that medicines were freely available and 24-hour helplines were set up.

The ministry was closely monitoring the situation but there was no shortage of drugs to treat patients, its statement said. The preparedness of government-run hospitals and health clinics in the worst affected states was being watched and the availability of drugs monitored.

Health authorities have also launched a campaign over television and radio to tell people about precautions they should take to avoid the flu.

Although it was being referred to as swine flu, doctors say it is a variant of the H1N1 pandemic influenza.

In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where six deaths were reported over the past two weeks, Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav said patients

would get free treatment in state-run hospital.

Doctors said casualties were high because patients delay going to hospitals and have urged people to get tested as soon as they feel symptoms.

The Delhi government capped the cost of tests by private labs at 4,500 rupees (\$72) to stop exorbitant fees.

Health ministry officials say they expect the cases to decline as the weather warms.

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