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June 11, 2009

To: All First Nations Communities, Métis and Urban Aboriginal Organizations
RE: H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Flu) Update

Today the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its Pandemic Alert Level from 5 to 6. I wanted to take the time to explain what this alert level change means and how it affects Interior Health's management strategy for this virus.

First, it's important to understand that the definition of "Pandemic" is measured by spread, not by severity of disease. Raising the alert level to phase 6 signals that the virus is moving between people in at least two countries in one WHO region, and that there have been community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region.

While this is the WHO's highest alert phase, the behaviour of the virus has not changed. Therefore, Interior Health's response will not change significantly from current levels unless the threat of the virus becomes more severe.

We have been fortunate at Interior Health—all confirmed cases of H1N1 Flu Virus, thus far, have not been severe and we have had very few cases. However, our work to understand this novel and unpredictable virus is far from over.

Interior Health is well prepared to manage a pandemic. In fact, planning has been going on for years within IH, in conjunction with our provincial and federal counterparts. IH also has groups in place working behind the scenes to continue planning and preparing for a possible second wave of this virus in the fall/winter.

In the meantime, the most important measures that can be taken to minimize the impact of this virus will not be by health professionals, but rather by you, the public. Frequent handwashing and good sneezing and coughing etiquette are still the best ways to stop the spread of influenza. And if you are ill, it's important you isolate yourself at home and stay there until you are symptom-free.

I want to assure you that Interior Health is monitoring the situation closely and will continue to keep you informed about important updates.

Sincerely,

Dr. Andrew Larder
Senior Medical Health Officer