



appendix C: WHO pandemic phases

In 1999, the World Health Organization (WHO) Secretariat published guidance for pandemic influenza and defined the phases of a pandemic. Updated guidance was published in 2005 to redefine these phases. This schema is designed to provide guidance to the international community and to national governments on preparedness and response for pandemic threats and pandemic disease. Compared with the 1999 phases, the new definitions place more emphasis on pre-pandemic phases when pandemic threats may exist in animals or when new influenza virus subtypes infect people but do not spread efficiently. Recognizing that distinctions between the two interpandemic phases and the three pandemic alert phases may be unclear, the WHO Secretariat proposes to base classification on assessment of risk based on a range of scientific and epidemiological data.

Table C-1: Summary of WHO Global Pandemic Phases (WHO Global Influenza Preparedness Plan, 2005)

Interpandemic Period

- Phase 1.** No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low
- Phase 2.** No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease

Pandemic Alert Period

- Phase 3.** Human infection(s) with a new subtype but no human-to-human spread or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact
- Phase 4.** Small cluster(s) with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localized, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans
- Phase 5.** Larger cluster(s) but human-to-human spread is still localized, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans but may not yet be fully transmissible (substantial pandemic risk)

Pandemic Period

- Phase 6.** Pandemic phase: increased and sustained transmission in the general population

Postpandemic Period

Return to the Interpandemic Period (Phase 1)

¹ <http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/influenza/whocdscsredc991.pdf>

² http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/influenza/WHO_CDS_CSR_GIP_2005_5.pdf

Recognizing that at any pandemic phase, national situations will differ based on whether a country is affected or not affected by the novel influenza subtype, the WHO Secretariat recommends “national subdivisions” of phases based on whether a country is experiencing disease or has extensive trade and travel links with an affected country. National subdivisions of phases will be designated by national authorities. In the United States, pandemic phases will be defined based on the global phase and determined by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. During the pandemic phase, additional subdivisions may be defined based on the extent of disease. In actual practice, the distinction between the various phases of pandemic influenza may be blurred or occur in a matter of hours, again underscoring the need for flexibility.

