

Media statement by WHO Representative to Maldives

Flu cases declining; efforts to prevent, detect and treat must continue

Male', 29 March – The number of new flu cases and those with severe acute respiratory infections requiring hospital admission have been declining in the last two weeks following stepped up efforts by the Ministry of Health. However, all efforts must continue to prevent, detect early and ensure appropriate treatment, to further minimize the impact of seasonal flu, which predominantly includes influenza A H1N1.

The Ministry of Health, with support of WHO and other partners, has been taking appropriate measures for early detection and treatment of flu, and prevention of its spread with good infection control measures in health facilities and enhanced awareness among public on how they can protect themselves and their family.

The government is offering flu vaccine to the most vulnerable population – pregnant women, the elderly, people who have undergone organ transplant or other serious surgeries, those with compromised immunity, chronic ailment, health workers and children between 6 months to 6 year old. This is helping in protecting the most vulnerable people.

The unfortunate deaths due to flu, reported recently, were of people who contracted flu earlier in the month, especially in the week of March 13 when the seasonal flu cases had peaked.

To strengthen government's efforts, WHO is providing rapid test kits for timely detection of cases, and flu medicine – Oseltamivir – to treat people with severe infection.

To support government's vaccination efforts, WHO is procuring 30 000 flu vaccines. The first batch of 1500 vaccines is expected to arrive later this week.

WHO continues to closely monitor the situation in Maldives with the Ministry of Health, to assess risks and requirements for testing and treating people with flu

Early detection, appropriate treatment, and good infection control measures in health care settings remains important. Adoption of simple preventive measures by the public, and awareness about and among the at-risk population to seek timely medical care, in order to minimize the impact of seasonal flu are important.

The influenza A H1N1 virus, which caused a pandemic in 2009, has become one of the many viruses that have been causing seasonal flu every year. The H1N1 (2009) virus is expected to continue to circulate as a seasonal virus for some years to come. An increase in the number of H1N1 cases this year is partly because the Ministry of Health, as part of strengthening response to flu cases, is testing more people for H1N1, than done earlier.

The ongoing measures to strengthen capacities to prevent and deal with seasonal flu will go a long way in minimizing health impact of flu in the coming years.