

## Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at Today's Media Briefing on the H1N1 Flu Outbreak



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Office of the Press Secretary  
Contact 202-282-8010  
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**Secretary Napolitano:** Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying this is the last day we plan to hold a daily briefing on the H1N1 flu situation. We will have briefings on an as-needed basis as new details warrant. So today I want to talk about where we are and then where we are going.

The CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] has confirmed 642 cases of H1N1 flu in 41 states. Additionally, CDC has begun reporting probable cases as well, which now stand at 845 in 42 states. Sadly, we also learned of the second death in the United States from H1N1 flu. This death was reported in Texas. We are respecting the privacy of that individual and that individual's family, and our thoughts and our prayers are with them.

Despite this loss and despite the fact that others may still come, the science tells us that this is most likely a milder strain than we first feared. As such, yesterday the CDC revised their school closure guidance and the doors of classrooms are and will be reopening across the country. But as I said yesterday, now is not the time to declare victory. We continue to have cases. We continue to vigilantly monitor the situation. And even if the encouraging signs we are now seeing hold firm, we know that this virus could come back stronger in the fall.

So where are we going? In the coming weeks and months ahead, we will be involved in an ongoing series of actions to ensure individuals, families, government, and private sector entities are well-prepared for what may come next. First is to work in a collective manner with the public health community and our international partners, closely monitoring the H1N1 flu to determine if it becomes more contagious and more severe than this initial outbreak. The Southern Hemisphere is entering its flu season now. We will pay close attention to the virus there.

Next, the CDC has already taken the first step on the vaccine by isolating the H1N1 strain. Once a reference strain has been developed—which CDC is now working on—they can at that time share it with pharmaceutical companies to produce an initial vaccine to test. As we are monitoring the progress of the vaccine, we'll also be taking a number of concurrent steps to enhance the nation's readiness for a potentially severe pandemic. Right now we don't know if this will be the case. But we want to have—we have an obligation to err on the side of safety. Thus, we are working across the federal government to ensure that plans for pandemic are revised in light of our experience these past 10 days—that we are as prepared and have thought through as many issues as possible should this virus re-present itself in the fall.

Next we are continuing working with state, local, tribal, and territorial health officials and emergency managers because they, too, have now seen after this round of outbreak what gaps they may have in their systems, and we want to work with them on that and what needs to be present.

Next we will continue to work with the private sector to make sure they have plans in place should a pandemic threaten their workforce. Again, over the past days we've had unprecedented contacts with the private sector.\* Indeed, we've had conference calls with more than 1,000 participants. But I think what came out of those calls is that many in the private sector really have gone through what they need to have in place to continue their business operations should they experience a high rate of absenteeism. So that work will continue as well.

Next we will continue to meet with President Obama, Homeland Security Advisor John Brennan, and other Cabinet members to go over additional areas where the federal government's response can be even more robust than it was this past ten days.

Finally, again, this is an area where we want to lean forward. This is an area where we are not declaring victory. "Cautious action" might be a phrase we could use—but where we need to continue to lean forward. And individuals and families, in addition to businesses and governments and public health authorities, individuals and

families have a shared responsibility here as well: the responsibility to stay home from work; keep your child home from school if you are sick with the flu; to cover your mouth when you cough, but cover it with your sleeve, not with your hand; to take common-sense steps to protect yourself and your family, including washing your hands regularly; and thinking through what you would do in your family if, for example, in the fall the schools need to close again for some period of time. We hope that is not the case—but again, part of being prepared for flu is thinking ahead of the flu and staying ahead of the flu, and that is what we intend to accomplish.

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\*Corrected typo: contracts to contacts.

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