



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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**Note for the media WHO/4
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WHO CONVENES INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO DISCUSS INFLUENZA PANDEMIC CONTAINMENT STRATEGY

Geneva- On Monday 6 March 2006, the World Health Organization (WHO) will convene a three-day technical meeting of international public health experts at its Geneva headquarters, to discuss a rapid response strategy in the event of an influenza pandemic emerging.

The meeting will continue development of an operational guide for WHO and other public health authorities to use in an attempt to extinguish a pandemic in its initial stages. Using the draft protocol issued on 27 January 2006 (http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/guidelines/RapidResponse_27%2001.pdf) as a departure point, the meeting will define priorities for WHO and its partners as planning for a pandemic containment effort moves forward.

The meeting will focus on three areas: operations (the logistics for mounting such an effort), surveillance and epidemiology, and public health measures (quarantines, anti-viral medicines, social distancing measures, etc.) From 6-8 March, more than 30 experts in a variety of disciplines including epidemiology, virology, public health, and laboratory issues, will discuss how WHO and the global public health community might effectively contain the transmission of a pandemic virus at its source.

A containment protocol will enable a coordinated approach to the rapid detection, assessment, and response to the emergence of a pandemic virus. Halting a pandemic depends on several factors, such as the early identification of the pandemic strain, the ability of the global community to implement containment procedures, and the ability to effectively control the movement of people in and out of the affected area, to prevent further geographical spread of the virus.

Even if the pandemic cannot be stopped, public health interventions might buy time to allow countries to further strengthen their response systems, as well as accelerating the production of pandemic vaccine. While no efforts to extinguish influenza pandemics have ever been attempted, the continued surveillance of the avian influenza H5N1 strain allows the global community a unique opportunity to monitor the evolution of a possible pandemic strain. If there is even a small chance that the enormous health, economic and social damages caused by a pandemic might be averted, then WHO has a responsibility to try.

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The opening of the meeting will be open to the public and to journalists from 9:am to 9:45 am. The meeting will begin at 9am on 6 March 2006, in Salle B at WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

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