



## Editorial

The prevalence of infection with influenza H1N1 since it was discovered for the first time in April 2009, is widespread and goes on at an unprecedented speed, causing outbreaks at the global level and recalling what happened last century with the same strain of the virus when the Spanish flu claimed the lives of millions of humans. The World Health Organization declared the sixth level of the epidemic in a short time after the prevalence of the virus.

The influenza pandemic is characterised by being often moderate among adolescents and young adults, noting that between 40 to 80% of the severe cases were suffering from latent ailments. The most important risk factors include (asthma - diabetes - pregnancy - immunodeficiency - vascular and cardiac diseases - and obesity).

\* Swine influenza is a respiratory disease that occurs in pigs and is caused by type (A) of the influenza virus that causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Swine influenza viruses cause high levels of disease among the pigs but mortality due to the disease is very low (1% - 4%).

Swine influenza viruses are, in most cases, of the subtype H1N1, but other subtypes are also circulating in pigs (eg, subtypes H1N1, H3N1 and H3N2). Pigs can also be infected by avian influenza and seasonal human influenza viruses, and some believe that human beings are the ones who have originally introduced H3N2 virus in pigs. Pigs can be infected in some cases by more than one virus simultaneously, thus enabling the genes of these viruses to mix with each other. In spite of the fact that swine influenza viruses are usually specific species and known to afflict only pigs, yet they sometimes are able to penetrate the barriers between species and infect humans. Hence a pandemic occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears which humans are not immune against. This could lead to the synchronization

of several epidemic outbreaks in the world and a higher rate of morbidity and mortality.

- \* The new virus spreads more rapidly as a result of travel and transport in various parts of the world. Most people, especially those who are not in regular contact with pigs, are not likely to have any immunity against swine influenza viruses that can protect them from infection. If a swine influenza virus was able to spread efficiently among humans, it can cause a pandemic. It is difficult to predict the impact of such a pandemic since its effects depend on the strength of the virus and the level of immunity.
- \* The disease is transmitted from an infected person or carrier of the disease to a healthy person through droplets from the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, as well as contact with objects contaminated by the virus. The incubation period is 1-5 days and rarely extends to 7 days. This is the period between the entry of the virus to the human body and the onset of symptoms. The most important ways of preventing swine influenza are to adhere to non-drug procedures. These procedures include constant washing of hands with soap, making sure to cover mouth and nose with disposable tissues while coughing or sneezing, keeping hands away from the nose, mouth and eyes, ensuring continuous cleaning of surfaces and floors with disinfectants, staying at home when feeling symptoms of influenza, consulting your physician, avoiding crowded places and contact with patients, and keeping oneself in good comfort with proper nutrition.
- \* We would like to recall that the laboratories of some companies have recently been able to develop a vaccine against this type of influenza in record time. It is worth noting that the vaccine has proved to be promising and efficient.

We now know that all actions and measures

taken to contain the virus and the pandemic are impractical and will not succeed, so strategies intended to reduce the pandemic impact must have well-defined purposes, which can be summarized in: reducing mortality and morbidity, enhancing fundamental services in order to prevent overtasking of health systems, and reduce the secrecy of the disease spread in the society.

The National Center for Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control has put forth the national strategy to combat influenza pandemic beginning in 2005 on the onset of avian influenza. Based on that strategy the National Directory of Influenza Pandemic Control was then issued. The Directory lists in detail all the procedures that must be followed.

Due to the dynamism and variability of the pandemic, measures are updated whenever the need arises. Applying this Directory has delayed importation of the virus to the Jamahiriya for a period of (70) days thanks to the precautionary procedures

taken in airports and border crossing posts.

After recording the first cases of (H1N1) the second implementation phase of the strategy was initiated, which requires taking action to slow the spread of the virus.

With the advent of winter the spread of the virus will amplify. It is also expected that the virus will become more virulent and may change its genetic pattern which could lead to a higher number of injuries and thus to a rise in the number of morbidity and mortality risk groups of the world. This coincides with the imminent onset of the pilgrimage season and the current assessment of data emanating from the global experience. The cancellation of the major gatherings could not necessarily lead to contain the transmission of the virus, however, limiting the spread of the disease can be targeted by the proper application of non-pharmaceutical measures such as social isolation, personal hygiene and use of personal protection equipment.

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