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WHO Says Global Swine Flu Deaths Exceed 700

By VOA News
21 July 2009

The World Health Organization says H1N1 swine flu has killed more than 700 people across the world since emerging in April.

The swine flu death toll, released Tuesday, is an increase of more than 270 from the figure reported two weeks ago. The U.N. health agency says it is examining what steps governments can take to limit an expected jump in infections when the northern hemisphere's autumn season begins later this year.

WHO spokeswoman Ashaluck Bhatiassevi said closing schools is one step that countries may consider. Speaking in Geneva, she said governments will face different levels of the pandemic at different times, and must decide what measures suit their situation.

Health experts in Britain, writing in the medical journal *The Lancet*, urged governments Monday to start planning for school closures. They said doing that can reduce the spread of swine flu.

But the chief medical officer for England and Wales, Liam Donaldson, said Tuesday the measure has not been effective against swine flu when implemented recently in some areas. Speaking on British television (GMTV), he said closing schools is "extremely disruptive" to society, and he questioned when they would re-open if the virus lingers for several months.

The WHO stopped asking countries to report swine flu infections last week, saying it was almost impossible for countries with major outbreaks to keep track of all cases. Laboratory tests have confirmed at least 125,000 swine flu infections worldwide.

Some information for this report was provided by AFP, AP and Reuters.

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