

Press Release
No Panic to Pandemic, Says Secretary-General of ASEAN
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Despite the current Influenza A(H1N1) pandemic, the region must not resort to panic measures that would affect movement of people and goods, said the Secretary-General of ASEAN today.

Stressing on the importance of increased vigilance within the region and continued transparency in the sharing of information, Dr Surin Pitsuwan called on all the ASEAN Member States to continue providing advice to their citizens with regard to protective measures, detection and treatment. "However, social and economic activities should not be interrupted due to unnecessary travel and trade restrictions," he cautioned.

Dr Surin was commenting on the decision of the World Health Organization to raise the pandemic alert level from 5 to 6 for the Influenza A(H1N1)virus, making it the first pandemic of the twenty-first century. While the decision reflects the geographic spread, it does not indicate the severity of the disease, with most cases producing mild symptoms.

"According to WHO, we are still in the early days of the pandemic, and it is being monitored closely. While some countries in the ASEAN region have already reported cases, some still have no cases to date," he said. The ASEAN Member States have long been preparing for a pandemic and the time has come to put their preparedness plans into full swing, he added.

ASEAN has been collaborating with the WHO and will continue to do so to monitor the situation. The Special ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting have met on 7-8 May 2009 to coordinate their responses to this pandemic. They now can implement the strategies they have agreed upon.

According to WHO, although the pandemic appears to have moderate severity in comparatively well-off countries, it is prudent to anticipate a bleaker picture as the virus spreads in areas with limited resources.