

**Statement by the Secretary-General of ASEAN:  
ASEAN Gears Up to Address Swine Flu  
ASEAN Secretariat, 29 April 2009**

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As the current outbreak of swine flu threatens to spread to the region, ASEAN officials are already stepping up its coordination to address this latest public health emergency, including the need to put in place common measures throughout the region.

“The region has the necessary experience to come to grips with this latest situation and I am now also coordinating with all ASEAN Ministers of Health in order to provide the necessary cooperation and support,” said Dr Surin Pitsuwan, the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

ASEAN, together with the World Health Organization, has had several exercises held in 2007, 2008 and 2009 to familiarise ASEAN health officials and to ensure a most direct and efficient delivery of Tamiflu and Relenza to the requesting countries. Tamiflu and Relenza can be used to treat symptoms of swine influenza and to prevent disease among those who are infected or exposed to the virus.

In cooperation with Japan, ASEAN has a stockpile of 500,000 courses of antivirals (Tamiflu and Relenza) stockpiled in Singapore and an additional 500,000 courses have been distributed to ASEAN Member States. “We have established a system to draw down the stockpile in the event there is a pandemic,” Dr Surin said. The ASEAN Secretariat is in full alert 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to anticipate any request for the antiviral drugs by the Member States,” he added.

“In view of the urgency, the ASEAN Secretariat is also arranging for a teleconference with the region’s health officials, comprising experts on communicable diseases and on emerging infectious diseases,” said Dr Surin. The teleconference aims to review current preventive measures that are being taken by the ASEAN Member States and the need to consider a common stand and secure agreement on issues related to the public health measures being carried out e.g., on surveillance, quarantine, border control and other relevant issues. The issue of mobilisation of additional resources such as the ASEAN stockpile of antiviral agents and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is also expected to be on the agenda.

Regional measures are expected to supplement that carried out by individual ASEAN Member States to ensure that they are prepared to face the occurrence of swine flu among humans. Cambodia, for example, has increased its surveillance for unusual respiratory illnesses in hospitals, health centres and airports. It has also prepared stockpiles of medication. The Philippines has meanwhile stepped up its surveillance and biosecurity measures in all international and local airports and has instituted thermal scanning for all arriving passengers from countries with reported swine flu cases.

The Secretariat is also to continue working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other regional health bodies, said Dr Surin. According to the WHO, which has declared this event as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, Phase 3 involves sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people with limited human-to-human transmission while Phase 4 is characterised by verified human-to-human transmission and able to cause community-level outbreaks. The WHO has stressed that this marks an upward shift in the risk for a pandemic.