TALKING POINTS ON WHO PANDEMIC ALERT
MOVING TO PHASE SIX

• The WHO (World Health Organization) may have changed what they are calling the current H1N1 outbreak, but nothing has changed in the United States or in Iowa in terms of public health’s response.

• The WHO pandemic phase designation is based on geographic spread of the influenza virus, not on the severity of the illness.

• A pandemic means the virus, for which no one has immunity, has spread around the world. We have been watching this virus spread to additional counties around the world and anticipated that this announcement would be made.

• Although the virus continues to spread to other countries, the disease continues to be a mild one for the most part. Health officials are not seeing significant changes in the virus in samples from various countries.

• The IDPH goal since the outbreak began has been to try and keep one step ahead of this unpredictable virus and do the planning and preparation necessary to keep Iowans healthy.

• Iowans may think the flu season is over; however, there may be continuing transmission of both our seasonal flu strains and novel influenza A (H1N1) over the summer.

• It continues to be important for Iowans to remember personal health actions:
  o Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.
  o Stay home from work or school and do not travel while ill.
  o Wash your hands often.

• IPDH, along with other state health departments, and the CDC, have been preparing for a pandemic and have been implementing our pandemic response plan for the past several weeks.
  o On a local level, local public health officials and hospitals continue to do surveillance and work closely with IDPH to monitor the spread and severity of the virus. Local public health is on the front lines of disease surveillance and prevention, working directly with local health care
providers, schools, and other community partners and leaders to keep their communities healthy.

- On a national level, this includes sending anti-virals to the states, beginning the work necessary to produce a vaccine, working with state and local officials on community mitigation strategies and monitoring and tracking the virus around the country.
- On a state level, IDPH continues to work with local public health officials to monitor and track the H1N1 virus.

- Here in Iowa, we are working hard across the government to be prepared for what happens in the fall with H1N1 when the traditional flu season starts. The CDC is preparing to have a vaccine tested and ready to go should the science determine we need to begin an immunization campaign.

- The change in the WHO pandemic alert level to Phase 6, will have no impact on our response in Iowa. From the beginning, we have assumed an aggressive public health approach to this outbreak.

- Today's WHO announcement should be an alert to countries in the southern hemisphere that the virus is likely present and health authorities should heighten their surveillance activities and review their pandemic plans.