

Obama declares H1N1 emergency (26/10/2552) (Details)

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Hundreds of residents line up for free H1N1 vaccinations Friday at a Los Angeles, California, area clinic.

Washington (CNN) -- President Obama has declared a national emergency to deal with the "rapid increase in illness" from the H1N1 influenza virus.

"The 2009 H1N1 pandemic continues to evolve. The rates of illness continue to rise rapidly within many communities across the nation, and the potential exists for the pandemic to overburden health care resources in some localities," Obama said in a statement.

"Thus, in recognition of the continuing progression of the pandemic, and in further preparation as a nation, we are taking additional steps to facilitate our response."

The president signed the declaration late Friday and announced it Saturday.

Calling the emergency declaration "an important tool in our kit going forward," one administration official called Obama's action a "proactive measure that's not in response to any new development."

Another administration official said the move is "not tied to the current case count" and "gives the federal government more power to help states" by lifting bureaucratic requirements -- both in treating patients and moving equipment to where it's most needed.

The officials didn't want their names used because they were not authorized to speak on the record.

Obama's action allows Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius" to temporarily waive or modify certain requirements" to help health care facilities enact emergency plans to deal with the pandemic.

Those requirements are contained in Medicare, Medicaid and state Children's Health Insurance programs, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act privacy rule.

Since the H1N1 flu pandemic began in April, millions of people in the United States have been infected, at least 20,000 have been hospitalized and more than 1,000 have died, said Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Frieden said that having 46 states reporting widespread flu transmission is traditionally the hallmark of the peak of flu season. To have the flu season peak at this time of the year is "extremely unusual."

The CDC said 16.1 million doses of H1N1, or [swine flu](#), vaccine had been made by Friday -- 2 million more than two days earlier. About 11.3 million of those had been distributed throughout the United States, Frieden said.

"We are nowhere near where we thought we would be," Frieden said, acknowledging that manufacturing delays have contributed to less vaccine being available than expected. "As public health professionals, vaccination is our strongest tool. Not having enough is frustrating to all of us."

Frieden said that while the way [vaccine](#) is manufactured is "tried and true," it's not well-suited for ramping up production during a pandemic because it takes at least six months. The vaccine is produced by growing weakened virus in eggs.

Source: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/10/24/h1n1.obama/index.html>