

Government Takes Steps Against Swine Flu.

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Kigali, Apr 28, 2009 (The New Times/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- The government has issued an alert over the recent international outbreak of Swine Influenza or Swine flu- a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs that infects people.

The Director General of Trac Plus, Prof. Michael Kramer, yesterday announced that, government is well equipped and set to identify any cases of the influenza and will act immediately to prevent transmission levels in case of an internal outbreak.

Apparently, confirmed and suspected cases have been reported in countries like the United States of America, Canada and Mexico and Europe.

"There is no reason for panic because, in 2008, Rwanda established a sentinel-surveillance system - a monitoring or reporting method for Avian Influenza which diagnoses such diseases and a National Reference Laboratory in four main hospitals around the country," Kramer said.

"So far we have alerted the sites about the current situation of the outbreak in order to intensify surveillance. Teams in district hospitals have also been trained on how to assess patients, take specimen and respond accordingly in case of an emergency." While addressing a press conference, Kramer also noted that some of the symptoms of this influenza include fever, fatigue, and diarrhoea.

Symptoms also include vomiting and sneezing, which he said that the public should endeavour to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing as a preventive measure.

"This is a public health emergency and all countries are concerned about this disease. It is of concern because the influenza virus changes each year and there is a possibility of a shift. A new virus which the population is not aware of can cause an endemic so we must be alert," Kramer underscored.

Severe pneumonia cases will also be assessed to determine whether or not they are related to this international outburst.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Health, 48 laboratories confirmed that human cases of Swine Influenza type A were reported from the USA and Mexico.

The virus belongs to a new subtype (H1N1) not previously detected in pigs or humans. The situation in Mexico and other countries is currently being investigated by World Health Organisation (WHO).

Kramer however refuted claims that Rwandans could catch the virus from pork and its products stressing that swine influenza has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork and other products.

Dr. Mamadou Malifa Balde, the officer in Charge at the WHO office in Rwanda, said the virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160 degrees Fahrenheit and 70 degrees centigrade.

Flyers with information concerning preventative measures and general symptoms of the influenza have also been prepared and will be distributed to all border crossings as well as Airport and Airstrips throughout the country.

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