



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **AU COMMISSION CALLS ON AU MEMBER STATES TO BE ALERT TO POSSIBLE SWINE INFLUENZA EMERGENCY IN AFRICA**

Recent incidences of the Swine influenza have caused alarm throughout the world. As of 29<sup>th</sup> April, the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a statement that Swine Influenza constitutes a public health emergency of international concern. In this regard, WHO has raised the alert from phase 4 to phase 5 which means that the disease can no longer be contained and concerns have been expressed that it can become a global pandemic. Apart from Mexico where it originated from, cases of the swine influenza have been detected in Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland and Israel

Even though no case of Swine Influenza has been detected on the African Continent, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mr Jean Ping joins the WHO Director General in calling for sustained efforts to mitigate the swine influenza. The Chairperson further urges all the AU Member States to be alert and vigilant about any possible outbreak of Swine Influenza on the Continent. While Swine Influenza does not respect national boundaries, Member States should be prepared to collaborate and coordinate their response to the scourge. AU health ministers are urged to discuss this matter during their forthcoming Conference of Ministers of Health to be held from 4-8 May 2009 in Addis Ababa.

- Member States who may be ahead in terms of emergency preparedness and response to health emergency should be ready to support other Member States who may need such assistance to deal with a Swine Influenza emergency. Further, since swine influenza is both a health and social issue, it is essential that all stakeholders such as institutions of higher learning, research institutions, pharmaceutical manufacturers, financial institutions, Non Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, and individuals mobilize the whole society, in order to be ready to deal with any outbreak of swine influenza in collaboration with WHO.

- It is necessary for individuals to take the following precautionary measures to protect themselves:
  - Avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and particularly with fever and cough. This is more so for people travelling from areas where infections have been confirmed.
  - Regular hand washing and use of masks.
  - Prompt disposal of tissues after use;
  - Discourage non-essential travel to places with confirmed Swine Flu cases;
- There is no evidence that Swine Flu can be transmitted through consumption of pork meat from infected animals. However, it is prudent to cook pork properly.

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by the type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Swine influenza changes rapidly. It can infect persons with direct exposure to pigs. It can spread from pigs to humans, humans to humans and humans to pigs. The influenza is not food-borne and has nothing to do with eating pork. Symptoms include: fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Mitigation efforts include: comprehensive surveillance especially at the airports where passengers are coming from countries with known cases of the swine influenza, notification and reporting of suspected cases during public health activities, rapid collaborative risk assessment, simultaneous coordination of national and regional responses, activation of national emergency preparedness and response, mobilization of the press and harmonization of information for rapid communication to the public, observing strict hygienic conditions at all public places and individuals should be urged to observe the high standards of hygiene. Once a case of swine influenza has been detected in a community, it may be necessary to close schools, public places and restrict mass gatherings.

**Addis Ababa, 30 April 2009**