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SENSITIVE

SIPDISE.O. 12958: N/ATAGS: CDC SOCI PREL AMED CASC XH UP

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: "UNKNOWN FLU" OUTBREAK IN TERNOPII REGION

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

1. (U) Summary: In the past two weeks, thousands of people in the Ternopil region of western Ukraine have fallen ill with an "unknown" type of flu, according to local media sources. Reports suggest at least seven people have died as a result of complications caused by this outbreak. While Ukrainian authorities have stopped short of indentifying the disease as A-H1N1, symptoms described in news reports suggest that the "swine flu" has arrived in force. Thus far, Ukrainian authorities have officially acknowledged only two cases of A-H1N1 in Ukraine and no deaths. However, local experts suspect that the number is significantly higher and likely to rise as the annual flu season comes into full swing. End Summary.

FLU OUTBREAK IN TERNOPII

2. (U) According to media reports, at least seven people in the Ternopil region of western Ukraine have died of complications caused by an unknown flu strain. Moreover, approximately 6,000 - 10,000 people visited local medical facilities to be treated for flu-like symptoms. Most patients are reportedly young and otherwise in good physical health. In response, Ternopil authorities have closed schools and universities and suspended public activities for children and teenagers. According to the Ministry of Health, medical facilities in Ternopil have instructions to isolate any patients presenting flu like symptoms as a precaution.

3. (SBU) The flu virus has so far not been identified as A-H1N1. According to Bohdan Oniskiv, head of the Ternopil Regional Administration's Health Department, the strain will be known by November 3, when authorities are scheduled to receive test results from a London-based WHO-certified laboratory. Unofficial testing results performed by the Ukrainian National Influenza Center should be available on October 30. The Ministry of Health has set up a special commission to investigate the causes of the outbreak in Ternopil and present its findings on November 1.

H1N1 IN UKRAINE



4. (SBU) Ukraine has so far acknowledged two cases of A-H1N1 in May and in September. Both individuals had travelled to Ukraine from other countries and fully recovered after hospitalization and treatment. However, as Dr. Galina Romanyuk of Program for Appropriate Technologies in Health (PATH), who is directly involved in PATH's pandemic influenza project in Ukraine, told us the actual number of those infected with H1N1 may be much higher due to difficulties associated with properly diagnosing the flu virus. Consensus opinion is that, with the advent of the annual flu season, the number of H1N1 cases in Ukraine is likely to increase dramatically.

ATTEMPTS AT PREPAREDNESS

5. (SBU) Oleksandr Bilovol, First Deputy Minister of Health and Ukraine's Chief Health Inspector said in a press conference on October 23 that Ukraine has filed an application with the World Health Organization (WHO) to buy H1N1 vaccines, should the situation in Ukraine deteriorate. According to Oleksandr Hrynevych, director of the Ukrainian Flu Center, H1N1 vaccines should be available by the end of the year, he said at a press conference on October 16. In the meantime, Ukrainian health authorities have distributed Tamiflu to regional hospitals but, according to PATH's Romanyuk, the quantities are likely to be insufficient and more will need to be purchased, should the situation deteriorate.

COMMENT

6. (SBU) Ukraine has thus far avoided a significant H1N1 outbreak, partially due to the relative difficulty average Ukrainians face in obtaining U.S. and Schengen (E.U.) visas. Emergency measures taken by the GOU after the first two individual H1N1 cases proved effective and prevented the spread of the virus. If the current Ternopil scare proves to be an actual H1N1 outbreak, however, the Ministry of Health will be forced to actively deal with an in-country epidemic and will likely need additional guidance from those already coping with outbreaks around the world.

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