

Press Statement
ASEAN Health Ministers to Meet
ASEAN Secretariat, 29 April 2009

ASEAN Health Ministers will meet shortly to discuss the region's collective response to contain the spread of Swine Influenza. This comes about as ASEAN Member States raised their alert levels and put in place precautionary measures to address the outbreak.

"The ASEAN Health Ministers should get together at the earliest time possible. The Thai Ministry of Public Health has expressed its readiness to host the meeting in Bangkok most probably in early May," said the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, after a flurry of consultations with Thailand and the Philippines. The Philippines would chair the meeting, added Dr Surin.

Thailand is the current chair of ASEAN while the Philippines is the current chair of the ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting framework. The move comes in the wake of the proposal by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen for an emergency meeting of ASEAN Member States to discuss measures to address the outbreak.

The meeting would provide an opportunity to assess the situation and to coordinate a collective regional response to the situation and also help prepare for the 62nd Annual World Health Assembly in Geneva from 18 to 27 May 2009, said Dr Surin. "The ASEAN Health Ministers could also explore the need to convene the 1st East Asia Health Ministers Meeting to discuss this issue," said Dr Surin.

The initiatives come as ASEAN stepped up gears to respond to the outbreak in response to the World Health Organisation elevation of its pandemic phase to 4. In a teleconference organised by the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta today, ASEAN health experts stressed that harmonising measures and initiatives is essential in the region's efforts to respond to the current outbreak of Swine Influenza. The regular sharing of information among ASEAN would also be helpful to address the situation, said the health experts from Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Singapore and Viet Nam.

During the teleconference, experts discussed specific actions being undertaken by the individual ASEAN Member States in addressing the threat of Swine Influenza. Although no cases has been reported in these countries, screening of arrivals from affected countries using thermal scanners and health declaration forms and health advisory to passengers have been put in place in some countries. Health care facilities are also on alert for cases. Public awareness campaigns including advertisements, press releases and press conferences have also been conducted to continuously inform the public and provide updates on the current situation of the swine influenza outbreak.