

The flu pandemic

By JAMES HARRIS



It is called the 2009 flu pandemic, but it is popularly known as the Mexican flu, or swine flu. Those in the medical profession call it the virus subtype H1N1, and it is causing worldwide concern. It is a global outbreak of a new strain of influenza, a combination of four known strains -- one endemic in humans, one in birds and two in pigs.

Transmission of the H1N1 is human-to-human. Birds or pigs cannot infect humans. It is popularly known as "swine flu" because the new virus has strains of pig flu, while the name "Mexican Flu" came about

because it was first identified in Mexico in April of this year.

When the new virus was identified, there was evidence to prove that there had been an ongoing epidemic for months before it was officially recognized as such. The Mexican government took drastic steps, closing most of the capital's public and private offices and public facilities for some time to contain the spread of the virus. Despite the measures taken by the Mexican authorities, the virus quickly spread globally, and in June the World Health Organization declared it to be a pandemic but also noted that most of the illnesses were of moderate severity.

Dr. Alexander Goroshit, the chief scientist of Zuf Globus Laboratories, explains that the new influenza strain is very similar to the seasonal influenza strain with one important exception: The virus is much stronger and more resilient and resembles the Spanish flu outbreak at the end of World War I. "At that time, millions of people died. But those were different times, and I don't think the results will be that dramatic today. For one thing, there were no antibiotics then, and the people of Europe were much weakened by the privations of the war," he says.

In most cases, the illness is generally mild; but there are higher risk groups, such as those with asthma, obesity, diabetes, heart ailments, pregnant women or those with a weakened immune system. The main danger of the H1N1 influenza is that it causes secondary infections. Most of those who succumbed during the Spanish flu epidemic died because of ancillary health problems, such as bacterial pneumonia.

Like other influenza viruses, the H1N1 influenza is spread by coughing, sneezing or touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the nose or mouth. The symptoms, which can last up to a week, are similar to those of the regular flu, such as fever, sneezing, sore throat, cough, headache and muscle or joint pains. To avoid spreading the infection, those with such symptoms should stay away from school, work and crowded places.

In Israel there have been cases of people falling ill with the H1N1 influenza, and a very small number have died. The government is taking no chances. It has taken the necessary steps to cope with the crisis. Some 1.5 million vaccines have been ordered from abroad, and more will be acquired if necessary and hospitals are ready to cope. H1N1 is a contagious disease. The best way to prevent the spread of the virus among humans includes using standard infection control against influenza, such as frequent washing of hands with soap and water, especially after being out in public. Chance of transmission is also reduced by disinfecting household surfaces, which can be done effectively with a diluted chlorine bleach solution. Experts agree that hand-washing can help prevent viral infections, including ordinary influenza and the swine flu virus. Also avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth with the hands can prevent flu.

Influenza can spread through coughs or sneezes, but an increasing body of evidence shows that small droplets containing the virus can linger on tabletops, telephones and other surfaces and be transferred via the fingers to

the mouth, nose or eyes.

While leading a hygienic lifestyle is one of the means to prevent the H1N1, Zuf Globus Laboratories Ltd. has developed Virmel, a new product based on medicinal plants that strengthen the body and prevent many varieties of flu and alleviate the symptoms when these occur.

Dr. Jackie Or is the chief medical director of the Tele Medicine company Natali Seculife and director of the emergency department at Tel Hashomer Medical Center. Natali Seculife provides emergency medicine, security and aid services to heart patients and senior citizens. The company's services include medical centers, emergency call centers, panic buttons, intensive care units, doctors' house calls and a variety of medical services.

Dr. Or explains, "While the immune system of most people can overcome the H1N1, there are some who are more susceptible than others; for example, those suffering from heart disease and other high risk groups. These people should call a doctor the moment they run a fever or have other flu symptoms. Others should call a doctor if they are feeling poorly and want to play it safe. In those cases, the doctors usually prescribe Tamiflu, a drug that shortens the lifespan of influenza."

Most people stay healthy most of the time despite the microorganisms and materials in their environment that can penetrate the body and cause illness. The body has specific and non-specific immune systems protecting it. The non-specific immune system has two lines of defense. The first acts as the border between the body's internal environment and the external environment. For example, skin is the outer envelope preventing foreign materials from penetrating the body. Other body apertures, such as the nose, mouth, sexual or excretory organs, have other means of removing environmental microorganisms or materials, such as secretions, tears or earwax

All types of flu, including swine flu, are caused by viruses – microorganisms that the human body is supposed to counteract with antibodies and interferon. But this process differs from person to person and depends on the strength of the individual's immune system. It may be weak due to various factors, such as illness, medication, fatigue or exhaustion. Virmel strengthens the immune system because it contains such ingredients as the following:

- Uncaria, known to have strong anti-viral properties while encouraging the production of interferon
- Echinacea, found to be very effective against upper respiratory tract infections and symptoms of swine flu
- Siberian ginseng, with its strong properties of stimulation and arousal of body energy, helps recovery from stress, operations and extended illness; improves the production of body energy; and stimulates fat burning and the production of interferon.



Dr. Alexander Goroshit, Chief scientist Zuf Globus Laboratories