

Mexico to virtually shut down this weekend

by UPI

MEXICO CITY -- Activities throughout Mexico will be curtailed through the weekend -- and longer in some cases -- in an attempt to slow the spread of swine flu, officials said.

Mexicans braced for a national shutdown of public services, offices, restaurants, schools, museum and athletic events to counter swine flu, blamed for more than 150 deaths and at least 2,000 illnesses, The New York Times reported Thursday.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon said in a nationally televised speech Wednesday many service facilities would be closed Friday through Tuesday. Most federal offices will be closed. Restaurants, schools and museums also would be closed and spectators would be barred from professional soccer matches.

Calderon urged people to stay in their homes during weekend, and said some closures and restrictions may be extended further into next week.

Mexican Health Minister Jose Cordova said all non-essential federal services will shut down, and the ban was extended to health clubs, gyms, museums and theaters.

Officials said police stations, airports, bus stations and Mexico City's subway system will remain open, as will banks, food stores, pharmacies and gasoline stations.

Flu-fighting efforts in Mexico, ground zero for the outbreak, and elsewhere round the world came after the World Health Organization raised its alert level on swine flu to phase 5 Wednesday, based on the flu's continuing spread in the United States and Mexico. The fifth level is the second-highest level in the worldwide warning system.

Worldwide, at least 12 countries have confirmed cases of swine flu, the Times reported. Switzerland became the fifth European country to report a case of the disease and, in South America, Peru reported its first case, news reports said.

Copyright © 2009, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Mexico to virtually shut down this weekend by UPI