

Producing swine flu vaccine tough call

by UPI

ATLANTA -- U.S. and world health organizations are trying to gauge the severity of the swine flu outbreak to determine how quickly to produce vaccine, officials said.

Health officials say they must balance quickly stopping the global spread of the swine flu -- or A/H1N1 -- with taking on some serious risks by moving too fast, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday.

Even an all-out push to develop a vaccine wouldn't produce the first doses until September, an official with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told a U.S. Senate hearing Wednesday.

Work has already begun on a vaccine -- the CDC said it has the basic components and is studying the composition of the virus to unravel why it caused serious illness and deaths in Mexico but milder symptoms elsewhere.

If the CDC and the World Health Organization, based in Geneva, decide the virus is threatening enough to warrant a vaccine, the basic ingredients will be passed to drug companies, which will carry out further studies and try to produce the vaccine in mass quantities, The Journal said.

Among the risks of pushing too quickly, health officials warn, is that the effort may force drug companies to cut corners or reduce production of common flu vaccine.

"That will be a very difficult choice," Christopher Viehbacher, chief executive of vaccine maker Sanofi-Aventis SA, said Wednesday. "If you make a swine-flu vaccine and the pandemic doesn't actually occur, we could end up with no seasonal flu vaccine."

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