

School closing clip 2:

(Music intro)

Ric Young: a Pandemic of influenza has arrived in the United States. Good afternoon, I'm Ric Young for GNN. Less than seven weeks after the deadly disease appeared in Thailand, US health authorities are seeing their first case in New York City. GNN has learned that authorities confirmed the disease in a traveler who recently returned from Hanoi by way of Paris. Cases are also suspected in Atlanta, Chicago, Honolulu, and Los Angeles but none have been officially confirmed. Joining us now to talk about the pandemic's impact and the global response are GNN Foreign Correspondent Brenna McDonna and our National Security Correspondent, John Wolf. The international community has been contending with this disease for some time now, Brenna I suppose it's no surprise that the US has finally been affected.

Brenna McDonna: That's true, Rick. Despite the international community's containment efforts, this virus acquired the capability to efficiently transmit between humans. Once that happened, a pandemic was inevitable. The disease quickly spread throughout southeast Asia and cases have now been confirmed in Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America.

John Wolf: Rick, the US has been expecting this for some time. Shortly after the WHO declared a pandemic the Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency. And the Secretary of Homeland Security declared what is called an "Incident of National Significance." Both of those declarations set in motion a number of preparedness actions at the federal state and local levels. State and local governments will bear the greatest burden in responding, but they face significant resource shortages. Regrettably, federal assistance won't come close to meeting their needs.

Ric Young: What kinds of assistance are they requesting?

John Wolf: They want federal assistance and screening international travelers and they're requesting antiviral drugs and medical supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile. They're also asking for stockpiled H5N1 vaccine, but preliminary testing suggests it is unlikely to prevent infection from this strain. And the vaccine being developed for this strain won't be ready for several months.

Ric Young: So what are we talking about here, how many sick people can we expect, and can our healthcare system cope?

John Wolf: The numbers are staggering: tens of millions of people could require hospital or outpatient care. And the health care system will face extreme shortages in staffing, medicine and other materials. There just aren't enough assets available to offset the shortages.

Brenna McDonna: Ric, similar shortfalls are occurring throughout the industrialized world. Developing nations are in even worse shape. Until a vaccine is ready, antiviral drugs are the primary means of both treatment and prevention. However, availability is a problem. For example Relenza, which is made in Europe is not available in the US. And despite considerable

progress in increasing production for Tamiflu, there just isn't enough to address the global need. Some countries are even resorting to a form of blackmail in an effort to get more of these drugs. Iran and Venezuela are threatening to stop exporting oil until they receive sufficient antiviral drugs. Counterfeit drugs also continue to be a major concern.

Ric Young: Is the pandemic affecting US national security interests?

John Wolf: Inevitably it will have some effect. The Defense Department is concerned about increased numbers of infections among our deployed forces as well as those of allies and coalition partners. Sources tell me that the pandemic may degrade the readiness posture of US troops and allied forces in Korea. The Defense and State Departments are grappling with how to protect personnel and family members stationed abroad as well as how to screen returning personnel. And despite our own problems with illness here at home, I think it's likely that other countries will increasingly turn to the US for leadership and support over the course of the pandemic. It's just unclear how much support will actually be able to provide.

Ric Young: We've learned that Interpol recently warned of a potential threat to vaccine production facilities in Europe what's being done to address this threat?

Brenna McDonna: The warning came after authorities learned that groups affiliated with Al Qaeda may have been planning to attack drug production facilities belonging to Roche and Glaxo Smith Kline. Security has been beefed up at the GSK facility in Germany, but I haven't heard what's been done at Roche.

Ric Young: we have to take a break in the moment, but I want to quickly address pandemics effect on the economy.

Brenna McDonna: Well, trade and transportation network disruptions have had cascading effects on other sectors. Regional markets have been declining for weeks. Certain stocks are dropping at an alarming rate, and trading volume is down. Analysts are expecting wider market disruptions as the pandemic continues. Ironically, the just-in-time practices of US businesses may prove to be our Achilles' heel as supply-chain disruptions impact every sector of the economy.

Ric Young: Well we're out of time, for now, but we've learned that the White House plans to hold a press briefing within the hour. We'll take you there when it begins. Stay with us. You're watching GNN.

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