

Pandemic status for swine flu declared

Oklahoma health officials say state plans will not be affected.

BY BARBARA HOBEROCK
World Capitol Bureau

OKLAHOMA CITY — Thursday's decision by the World Health Organization to declare a swine flu pandemic will not affect how Oklahoma deals with the virus, state officials said.

Scott Sproat, chief of emergency preparedness and response service for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, said at a state Board of Health meeting Thursday that the number of swine flu cases in Oklahoma and elsewhere continues to rise.

The state has seen 114 confirmed cases of the virus and one death, Sproat said. An additional seven people are presumed to have the virus, he said.

Worldwide, swine flu has caused 144 deaths, compared with seasonal flu that typically kills about 500,000 people a year.

Thursday's announcement by WHO about the first global flu epidemic in 41 years doesn't mean that the virus is any more lethal — only that its spread is considered unstoppable.

Since it was first detected in late April in Mexico and the United States, swine flu has reached 74 countries, infecting nearly 29,000 people. Most who catch the bug have only mild symptoms and don't need medical treatment.

WHO chief Dr. Margaret Chan made the long-awaited declaration after the U.N. agency held an emergency meeting with flu experts and said she was moving to phase 6 — the agency's highest alert level — which means a pandemic is under way.

State health officials are concerned that the virus, also called N1H1, will be more serious this fall, Sproat said.

Antiviral medications appear to be effective in reducing the effects, he said.

Symptoms typically include fever, cough, sore throat and body aches consistent with other flu viruses.

The agency is planning with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for a possible national mass vaccination campaign targeted for the fall, Sproat said.

WHO now is recommending that pharmaceutical companies make swine flu vaccine. The agency typically recommends which flu strains drug companies should use in the vaccines. In a global outbreak, WHO also advises whether companies should make pandemic vaccine.

The decision to make pandemic vaccine is a gamble. Most flu vaccine makers cannot make both regular seasonal flu vaccine and pandemic vaccine at the same time. That means they must decide which one the world will need more.

Drug giant GlaxoSmith-Kline PLC said it could start commercial production of pandemic vaccine in July but that it would take months before large quantities are available.

In other action: The state Board of Health approved emergency rules for reporting stem-cell research. The rules were the result of a 2008 law, said John Corpolongo, chief for screening, special services and the SoonerStart program.

The specific nature of the research, the goal of the research and the contact information is to be reported to the state Health Department, Corpolongo said.

The information will assist the Legislature and policy-makers in determining the financial needs of researchers, he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Soldier's mission gets helping hand

A headquarters is being built for his foundation, which raises scholarship funds for families of killed or disabled military personnel.

BY MATT DOYLE
World Sports Writer

OWASSO — Maj. Dan Rooney has never believed in mere chance.

There is always a purpose, a meaning, or a direction for him as to why he meets people or encounters certain situations.

It was for that reason that the F-16 fighter pilot with the Tulsa-based 138th Fighter Wing of the Oklahoma Air National Guard created his Folds of Honor Foundation more than two years ago.

Rooney's foundation raises money for scholarships for the children and spouses of military service personnel who have been killed or disabled in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Rooney, though, is someone who always has strived to do more for the families.

His vision to have a place to tell and share the stories of these fallen troops was something for which Rooney thought would take years to raise the necessary funds and ultimately construct.

But thanks in part to a speaking engagement Rooney had earlier this year with the Oklahoma chapter



With the clubhouse under construction in the background, people tour the Patriot Golf Course east of Owasso on Thursday. STEPHEN HOLMAN/Tulsa World

of the Associated Builders & Contractors, that vision will be realized by year's end.

On Thursday night, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the Folds of Honor Foundation's new headquarters at the site of Rooney's Patriot Golf Club, which is tentatively scheduled to open later this fall in Owasso.

The projected cost for the nearly 3,500-square-foot Folds of Honor building is \$1 million. But after Associated Builders & Contractors members heard Rooney's moving talk about the mission for his foundation at their monthly meeting in February, they came together to make this project a labor of love.

Four local construction

companies — Flintco, LD Kerns, Key and Crossland — and various specialty contractors all have donated time and materials to the project and lowered the price tag considerably.

"We knew we had to do something, but we weren't entirely sure what we could do," said Barb Risenhoover, owner of Advantage Glass and former chairman of ABC of Oklahoma's board of directors. "After talking with Crossland, LD Kerns, Key and Flintco, we'd said, 'Boys, we need your help.' And they all said it would not be a problem."

After a meeting Thursday, Associated Builders & Contractors announced that it had all the concrete, me-

chanical, electrical, plumbing and steel studs for this project donated.

"We have already cut the price on the building in half," Risenhoover said. "And we'll probably cut the price in half again. This (foundation) is amazing, but this (response from ABC) is not amazing. ABC is the most caring and patriotic group of people you'll ever meet. Everybody has put on an ABC hat for this project."

That was no surprise to ABC of Oklahoma President and CEO Carl Williams, or to Rooney.

"I am never amazed at the can-do and will-do attitude of our members," Williams said. "Dan's mission here by far will be greater than any mission



PATRIOT

Dan Rooney: The project might have taken years but instead will take months, he says.

he's accomplished as a pilot." Rooney's foundation has awarded 500 scholarships and raised more than \$3 million from its annual Labor Day weekend fundraiser, Patriot Golf Day, the last two years. The foundation, however, had not formally begun any fundraising plan for its headquarters.

Rooney said that with the depressed economy it might have taken a handful of years to get all the money in place to start construction. Now, construction on the building is scheduled to begin in mid-July and is expected to take about five months.

"To accomplish great things, you need to make great sacrifices," Rooney said at Thursday's groundbreaking. "When you reach out to those in need, you are the ones being helped."

"The ABC members are true patriots. Our foundation has taken a dark situation and is bringing some light to it," he said. "We're not just building a structure, we're building a statement. We're building a place where this mission will thrive."

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