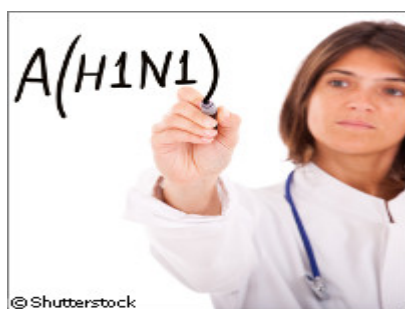


Study finds regional differences in assessment of swine flu risk

An international team of researchers has revealed important regional differences in people's personal response to the swine flu threat. Only 26% of individuals were 'very concerned' about being a flu victim, the study now published in the open-access journal BMC Infectious Dis...



An international team of researchers has revealed important regional differences in people's personal response to the swine flu threat. Only 26% of individuals were 'very concerned' about being a flu victim, the study now published in the open-access journal BMC Infectious Diseases finds. However, only 5% of Europeans admitted to this level of

worry as opposed to 42% of Malaysian participants.

The findings are based on a total of 328 individuals in Europe and Malaysia who completed an online or paper questionnaire during a 6-day period following the pandemic alert level 5 issued by the World Health Organization (WHO). European responses came primarily from the UK and Portugal.

The questionnaire focused on changes in transport usage, purchase of preparatory goods for a pandemic, indicators of anxiety, estimated mortality rates for seasonal flu, the effectiveness of seasonal flu vaccinations, and changes in pork meat consumption. Responses showed that in most cases, Malaysian respondents were more likely to change their behaviour than Europeans due to the swine flu threat. For instance, 48% of Malaysians reported reduced use of public transport in order to cut down exposure to the virus. On the other hand, only 22% of Europeans took similar measures.

At the end of the study (30 April to 6 May 2009), there had been 27 confirmed cases of swine flu in Europe, but none in Asia. Nevertheless, 'Malaysians were particularly

anxious about a pandemic, despite the lack of cases of this influenza in Malaysia during the research period, probably reflecting the recent avian influenza alert in this country,' the paper reads.

In addition, the researchers discovered that Europeans greatly underestimated the mortality rates of seasonal flu: 64% believed that it killed under 100,000 people worldwide every year. In fact, actual numbers are between 250,000 and 500,000. Of the European respondents, 26% also wrongly assumed that the seasonal flu vaccination gave immunity against swine flu.

'Despite major media and governmental campaigns across Europe, there is obviously still a need for greater information with respect to symptomology and immunisation,' comments the lead author of the study, Dr Robin Goodwin of Brunel University in Uxbridge, UK.

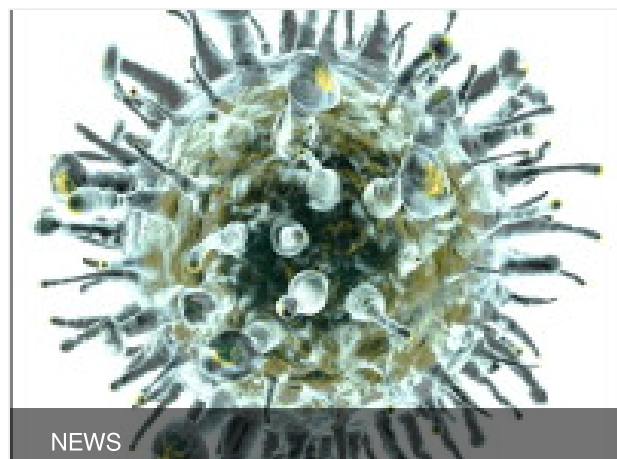
Asked to identify groups at particular risk of infection, both groups of respondents indicated the immune-compromised (87%), pig farmers (70%), the elderly (57%), prostitutes/highly sexually active people (53%), and the homeless (53%). However, Europeans were more likely to consider the elderly and those with a weakened immune system at risk, while Malaysian respondents assigned greater risk potential to pig farmers, general farmers, homosexuals and prostitutes.

'During pandemics, particular 'out-groups' may be vulnerable to discrimination,' Dr Goodwin warns. 'Political and health authorities need to be wary of increased stereotyping and prejudice towards such groups.'

Countries

Malaysia, Portugal, United Kingdom

Related articles



EU-funded study finds pandemic swine flu infects cells deep inside lungs

11 September 2009



Study sheds light on H1N1 origins

26 May 2009

Last update: 6 October 2009

Permalink: <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/31326-study-finds-regional-differences-in-assessment-of-swine-flu-risk>

European Union, 2025