



PRESS RELEASE

**WCMC-Q Hosts Expert Presentations on Flu and H1N1**

**Doha, September 29, 2009** –Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar hosted a detailed talk about a virus that’s causing concern around the world. The recent cause of an interruption in local school openings, H1N1 information was presented in timely fashion by Dr. Abdullatif Al-Khal, head of the communicable disease unit at Hamad Medical Corporation, and Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, Professor of Public Health at WCMC-Q.

“A totally new virus called ‘Influenza A (H1N1) of Swine Origin,’ now called ‘pandemic (H1N1) 2009,’ took the world by surprise and has become the first global influenza pandemic for this century,” Dr. Al-Khal said. “It spread rapidly all over the world in a matter of a few weeks despite attempts to implement strict control measures in many countries.”

Since experts are uncertain about how widely the virus will spread and how severe it could become, it has gathered much media attention. To ease concerns, the speakers discussed terminology that would help the community understand the scale of the problem and what they can do about it.

“The word pandemic can inspire fear among people, but when you look at the criteria health experts use to apply this term, you can put the virus into perspective,” said Dr. Mamtani. “A virus becomes a pandemic when it is new, when it causes illness and when it spreads easily—the term is not associated with the death rate, which in this case is still relatively low.”

The speakers said that knowledge about H1N1—from a public health and prevention point of view—is the best tool one can have against the virus. They offered a historical glimpse of the viruses that have emerged and spread over the past 100 years to claim millions of lives—Spanish Flu, Asian Flu and Hong Kong Flu.

One unusual aspect of H1N1 is that, while many viruses are life-threatening among the elderly, this virus so far causes higher mortality among adults under 50 years of age, Dr. Mamtani said.

“This is in stark contrast with seasonal influenza, where about 90 percent of severe and fatal cases occur in people 65 years of age and older,” he said. “It’s important to be aware that this virus can challenge even the most robust of immune systems.”

Yet one thing remains exactly the same between seasonal influenza and H1N1 — the way they spread.

“This virus spreads through person-to-person contact, through coughing and sneezing, and touching contaminated objects and then your mouth, nose or eyes,” Dr. Mamtani said. “In this case, we know what we need to do to help prevent its spread.”

Dr. Al-Khal recommended the following preventative measures:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you sneeze and cough, and throw the tissue in the trash
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds, or, use an alcohol-based sanitizer or hand wipe to clean your hands, often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth directly with your hand when outside
- Try to avoid contact with sick people
- If you are sick with flu-like symptoms—unusual tiredness, headache, runny nose, sore throat, shortness of breath or cough, loss of appetite, aching muscles, diarrhoea or vomiting—seek medical care

*Ends*

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Established in partnership with Qatar Foundation, WCMC-Q** is part of Weill Cornell Medical College (WCMC) of Cornell University, the first US institution to offer

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its MD degree overseas. WCMC-Q shares the triple mission of WCMC: a dedication to excellence in education, patient care, and biomedical research.

WCMC-Q offers an innovative program of pre-medical and medical studies leading to the Cornell University MD degree. Teaching is by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty, including physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) who hold Weill Cornell appointments.

Faculty and staff of WCMC-Q and WCMC are building the research capacity of Qatar in partnership with Qatar Foundation, HMC, the Ministry of Health and other organizations, with a focus on high quality research in genetic and molecular medicine, women's and children's health, gene therapy, and vaccine development.

Website: [www.qatar-weill.cornell.edu](http://www.qatar-weill.cornell.edu)

**About Qatar Foundation** Founded in 1995 by decree of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, Qatar Foundation is a non-profit organization focusing on education, scientific research and community development. Under Qatar Foundation's umbrella are Education City, which comprises elite universities, several academic and training programmes and Qatar Science and Technology Park, which boasts more than 21 world class companies involved in scientific research and development.

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