

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 25, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

The nation faces a serious potential public health threat this winter from a strain of virus known as swine influenza.

One month ago this strain of influenza was discovered and isolated among Army recruits at Fort Dix, New Jersey. The appearance of this strain has caused concern within the medical community because this virus is very similar to the one that caused a widespread and very deadly flu epidemic late in 1918-19. Some Americans will recall that 548,000 people died in this country during that tragic period -- and 20 million people worldwide.

I have consulted with members of my Administration, leading members of the health community and public officials about the implications of this new appearance of swine flu. I have been advised that there is a very real possibility that unless we take effective counteraction, there could be an epidemic of this dangerous disease next fall and winter here in the United States.

The facts that have been presented to me in the last few days have come from many of the best medical authorities in this country. These facts do not suggest there is any cause for alarm. The scientific community understands what we are dealing with and they have developed a vaccine that will be effective in combatting it. The facts do suggest, however, that there is a need for action now -- action by the Government, action by industry and the medical community, and most importantly, action by all of our citizens.

Although no one knows at this time exactly how serious this threat could be, we cannot afford to take chances with the health of our people. Accordingly, I am taking the following action.

I am asking the Congress for a special supplemental appropriation of \$135 million -- prior to their April recess -- to insure the production of sufficient vaccine to inoculate every man, woman and child in the United States.

I have directed HEW Secretary David Mathews, and the Assistant Secretary for Health, Dr. Theodore Cooper, to develop and implement plans that will make this vaccine available to all Americans.

Finally, I am asking each and every American to make certain he or she receives the vaccine this fall. Inoculations are to be available at schools, hospitals, physicians' offices, and public health facilities.

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Extraordinary measures are necessary because of the short time period available to assure adequate vaccine production and to mobilize the nation's health care delivery system. An extensive immunization program must be in full-scale operation by the beginning of September and should be completed by the end of November, 1976.

I urge the Congress to act immediately to pass this special supplemental appropriation separately. This \$135 million appropriation, if acted on promptly, will be a key factor in putting this threat behind us before next winter.

GERALD R. FORD

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MARCH 25, 1976

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