

GENEVA: The Head of the World Health Organization (WHO) Dr Margaret Chan warned on Tuesday that the A/H1N1 pandemic influenza is not over yet and the world needs to continue monitoring the evolution of the disease in 2010, reported China's Xinhua news agency.

It's too premature, too early for us to say we have come to an end of the pandemic influenza worldwide, Dr Margaret Chan told a news conference at the WHO headquarters in Geneva.

It's true that many countries in the northern hemisphere have passed the peak of the pandemic, notably in the United States, Canada and parts of Europe, but on the other hand there are still intensive influenza activities in countries like Egypt and India, Chan said.

The current pandemic caused by the H1N1 flu virus has been described as moderate, but scientists cannot rule out the possibility that the virus could mutate and become more dangerous given the fact that flu virus are highly unpredictable.

So it would be prudent and appropriate for the WHO together with our members states to continue to monitor the evolution of this pandemic for the next six to 12 months, Chan said.

So far nearly 12,000 people worldwide have been killed by the A (H1N1) influenza since the disease first emerged in April, according to an update released by the WHO last week.

But Chan noted that was a laboratory confirmed number, and it actually underestimates the real number of deaths caused by the pandemic.

Many countries don't have the capacity for surveillance, for diagnosis and for confirmation. So there would be some deaths in some countries that are not reported, Chan said.

According to the WHO chief, the handling of the A(H1N1) pandemic has shown that the world is much better prepared now than five years ago to deal with such diseases. But there are still many gaps in the health systems in many countries.

She warned that the world is not yet ready for dealing with a pandemic caused by the H5N1 bird flu virus, which is much more toxic and deadly than the H1N1 virus.

I just wish that the world does not have to deal with a pandemic ignited by a much more toxic and deadly virus, the avian flu virus H5N1, Chan said.

-- Bernama

Source: <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/12/30/nation/20091230090956&sec=nation>