

Computer software part of Winnipeg paramedics' arsenal against swine flu

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Winnipeg's Fire-Paramedic Service is taking special precautions during the swine flu outbreak, using a high-tech tool as part of the city's pandemic response plan.

Computer software called First Watch lets first responders and dispatchers identify and track calls for help that could be related to an outbreak of illness. It also maps calls across the city to indicate where a possible outbreak is taking place.

WFPS Chief Jim Brennan said the system was programmed on Friday.

"If we were ever confronted by a pandemic, it would be so much more useful because then we could identify which areas of the city are most affected, where are these patients being picked up," he said.

He said the system protects front-line health workers because it allows them time to prepare to treat a patient suspected of having a contagious illness.

Manitoba health officials say there are no confirmed cases yet of the virus in the province.

The World Health Organization said Wednesday that laboratory tests have confirmed 114 cases in seven countries, including:

- 13 cases in Canada (Alberta, B.C., Ontario, Nova Scotia).
- 91 cases in U.S. with one reported death.
- 26 cases in Mexico with seven reported deaths.
- Two cases in Israel.
- Four cases in Spain.
- Two cases in the United Kingdom.
- Two cases in New Zealand.

If an outbreak of the swine flu took place in Winnipeg, first responder crews and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority would likely know in just seconds, said Mayor Sam Katz.

"Over the past weekend, there were 41 calls for respiratory ailments, and four were considered significant enough to take precautions with masks and isolation techniques. None of the four had contacted the swine flu," he said.

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