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**Feature** Conflicts of Interest

# WHO and the pandemic flu “conspiracies”

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## Rapid Response:

### WHO Changed Definition of Influenza Pandemic

Cohen and Carter state that the WHO changed the definition of an influenza pandemic by excluding reference to the words "with enormous numbers of deaths and illness."

What the article fails to state is that the WHO made two changes; the second change was to drop the requirement for a new sub-type with a simple reassortant virus meaning that many seasonal flu viruses could be classified as pandemic influenza.

A search of online web archives reveals that the WHO website had the erased definition dating back to at least January 2003 through to July 2008. [1]

"An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity, resulting in several, simultaneous epidemics worldwide with enormous numbers of deaths and illness. ... When a major change in either one or both of their surface proteins occurs spontaneously, no one will have partial or full immunity against infection because it is a completely new virus. If this new virus also has the capacity to spread from person-to-person, then a pandemic will occur."

Seroprevalence studies emerging show that substantial portions of society had pre-existing protective antibody levels across age groups. A new scientific study shows the full effect of Pandemic Influenza H1N1 in New Zealand in 2009

The Ministry commissioned study, conducted by Environmental Science and Research (ESR), estimates that 1.26 million or 29% of New Zealanders were immune to the pandemic influenza virus by March this year. [2]

About 480,000 people had some immunity prior to last year's pandemic wave, mostly in the older age groups. An additional 780,000 were estimated to have been infected during 2009. The highest rate of infection during 2009 was in school age children - where one in three children were affected. Almost half of those infected showed no obvious symptoms.

14 percent of New Zealand school aged children had pre-existing antibodies to the 2009 H1N1 virus.

If the WHO guidelines in effect at the time that the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus was identified in the USA in April 2009 then it would never have been declared a pandemic as it was not a new sub-type, was not causing enormous numbers of deaths and illness, and a significant number of people had already been exposed to an immunogenically similar virus.

The fact that only one vaccination was required for all but young children is another sign that this was not an immunogenically novel virus.

[1]

[http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pa...](http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pa...)

[2] Seroprevalence of the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) pandemic in New Zealand, [http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/10124/\\$File/seroprevalence-flu-2009.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/10124/$File/seroprevalence-flu-2009.pdf)

Competing interests:

None declared

**Competing interests:** No competing interests

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