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Swine Flu Fantasies

A testing epidemic, spread by media ignorance

[Terry Michael](#) | June 2, 2009

Two very unfortunate realities explain the recent frenzy of public mask wearing, cable TV fear marketing, and the waste of probably a billion tax dollars worldwide in flu virus surveillance. First, there are the tunnel-visioned infectious disease prevention bureaucracies, which tout their epidemiological monitoring as the frontline protecting human health. Then there's the half-witted media propagandists, who wouldn't know the inside of a biology lab from a Labrador Retriever, and who avoided Statistics 101 like the plague.

I write while traveling late May in the South Pacific, where tens of thousands of passengers like me are greeted daily by an army of health ministry workers in New Zealand and Australia, collecting special health report forms from generally healthy passengers, and even video-capturing each face that passes by their airport control points. *Late May*. That's over a month since it should have been obvious to anyone with elementary logic skills that the pig flu is no uglier than hundreds of its viral cousins.

What separates H1N1 or "swine flu" (pity the poor pork producers) from other genetic code written in nucleic acid and wrapped in a little protein—the definition of a virus—is not an epidemic of illness or death. It's an epidemic of testing.

If you do a Google search for news from the first week of the "epidemic," you will find that Mexican health authorities counted 159 deaths as of April 28, as [reported in *The New York Times*](#). A month later, when you might expect that number to be appreciably higher, the Associated Press [listed the death toll](#) in Mexico at 89—with the AP conveniently forgetting to report the nearly 100% disparity from the earlier statistic. That same AP story noted that the "world's death toll" was 108.

By April 29, Mexican health authorities were triumphantly heralding the discovery of "patient zero," a little boy in the town of La Gloria, who had suffered some flu-like symptoms a few weeks earlier and had fully recovered—again, [according to the *Times*](#). In the same story, however, the *Times* also reported that, "Before Édgar fell ill, another person in San Diego may have been affected, said Dr. Miguel Ángel Lezana, Mexico's chief government epidemiologist." So much for patient zero.

Within a couple of weeks of that triumph of Mexican epidemiology, we learned no virus had been detected by testing swine at the pig farm near little Édgar Hernández's home. (Pity the poor little boy and his tearful mother, who lamented the world's fingering her son as the source of the Great Swine Flu of 2009.)

A few more than 100 deaths in the past month would be no more than a fraction of those who die each day in the U.S., Mexico, and the rest of the world from the amorphous disease described by the medical term of art, "the flu."

Indeed, the New York school children who tested positive for it in late April yet suffered nothing more than sniffles and tummy aches, provided early confirming anecdotal evidence that H1N1 was no killer bug.

So why the pig flu panic? Thanks to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO)—and all the health ministries they influence, like those in New Zealand and Australia—the world was subjected to frenetic surveillance of a single "new" flu strain.

If similar resources were used to check for other strains of virus causing other cases of flu-like illness during the same time period, mothers around the globe would have been panicked by some other viral code, though perhaps one with a less scary and dirty-sounding name.

But the well-funded CDC and WHO, not to mention those health ministries in New Zealand and Australia, wouldn't have had the necessary threat to yield them even bigger budgets from politicians pandering to a panicked public. And that panic, of course, has been provoked by science-challenged "news" organizations that propagandize for the virus-obsessed health agencies.

Epidemiologists studying communicable diseases are not the first or even second line of defense for our health. Strong immune systems are. It was their immune systems—not the CDC and WHO, not doctors, not drug peddling pharmaceutical companies—that protected those school children in New York, a few of whom had been to Mexico, where, like much of the developing and third world, poor nutrition and exposure to drinking water polluted by old bacterial pathogens weakens natural immunities to disease.

But proper nourishment and clean water don't have public relations advisors like the CDC and the WHO. So what we might call "flu-ism" spreads, a psychological phenomenon that can make us stupid as pigs, but not actually very ill.

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