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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

4:50 P.M. EST

I have just concluded a meeting on a subject of vast importance to all Americans and let me report to you the results of that meeting.

One month ago a strain of influenza, sometimes known as swine flu, was discovered and isolated among Army recruits at Ft. Dix, New Jersey. The appearance of this strain has caused concern within the medical community because this virus is very similar to one that caused a widespread and very deadly flu epidemic late in the first World War. Some older Americans today will remember that 548,000 people died in this country during that tragic period.

During the last few days I have consulted with members of my Administration, Secretary Mathews and Dr. Cooper and leading members of the health community and public officials about the applications of this new appearance of swine flu. I have been advised that there is a very real possibility that unless we take effective counter-action, there could be an epidemic of this dangerous disease next fall and winter here in the United States.

Let me state clearly, at this time no one knows exactly how serious this threat could be. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to take a chance with the health of our Nation. Accordingly, I am today announcing the following actions.

First, I am asking the Congress to appropriate \$135 million prior to their April recess for the production of sufficient vaccine to inoculate every man, woman and child in the United States.

Secondly, I am directing the Secretary of HEW, David Mathews, and Assistant Secretary Dr. Cooper, to develop plans that would make this vaccine available to all Americans during the three-month period from September to November of this year.

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

The reaction to the shot, I am told, may mean a few sore arms for a day or two--a very small price to pay for this vital protection.

The facts that have been presented to me in the last few days have come from many of the best medical minds in this country. These facts do not suggest there is any cause for alarm. The scientific community essentially 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.

We are taking the first steps this afternoon, and before next winter I hope we will have put this threat behind us.

I would like to thank the very outstanding group of technicians who came in and met with me for an hour or so this afternoon -- Dr. Salk, Dr. Sabin and others here who have convinced me beyond any doubt whatsoever that this is the right course of action, and tomorrow I will submit to the Congress a Message and a budget supplement so that this money will be available and available as promptly as possible.

We discussed how the supplemental should be handled, whether it should be a part of the supplemental that is now going through the Congress or a separate supplemental that would be identified only for this purpose and passed by both the House and the Senate for this purpose and this purpose alone.

It is my recommendation that the Congress take this item for \$135 million, act promptly on it and not tie it up with a broader supplemental appropriation bill.

Now it is my pleasure to ask Dr. Mathews, Secretary of HEW, and Dr. Cooper and the other distinguished scientists who are here who can answer your technical questions.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 4:56 P.M. EST)