

The News



A TALE OF BROTHERS
'Cochochi' is slow, quiet look at Rarámuri life

LIVING: PAGE 16

Works by Mexican artists expected to fetch high prices at upcoming auction

LIVING: PAGE 17



Monterrey's potent attack poses test for América; Chivas need win vs. Puebla

SPORTS: PAGE 20

saturday may 2, 2009 • MEXICO CITY

Year 59 Number 297 24 pages \$15.00

www.thenews.com.mx

Shutdown on as officials cite gains against virus

Flu deaths and new hospital admissions fall

BY JONATHAN CLARK
 AND GARRETT NASWORTHY
 The News

Swine Flu
 Outbreak

The nation began a five-day shutdown Friday to contain the deadly swine flu epidemic as officials offered more hopeful signs that the virus may be abating.

But as the news took a more optimistic tone, some citizens wondered if the government had overreacted to the outbreak, needlessly frightening the public and bruising the economy.

Health Secretary José Ángel Córdova said Friday that his office had confirmed 16 deaths and 397 infections from the virus, up from the 12 deaths and 312 infections reported a day before. But he also said that the nation's public hospitals admitted just 46 patients with severe flu symptoms on Thursday, down from 212 patients on April 20.

"These are encouraging numbers that make us think that, fortunately, the virus isn't so aggressive," Córdova said at a press conference.

Reduced public activity and quick treatment are proving effective in stopping the spread of the virus, he said.



Public transport, like much of the D.F., was largely empty Friday, a national holiday that marked the start of a five-day shutdown.

"If treatment is given the first day [of diagnosis], the patient is practically no longer a transmitter," he said.

Officials stopped reporting suspected deaths and infections earlier this week when the numbers approached 170 and 2,500, respectively.

The federal government has canceled classes for all students through May 6, shuttered its offices and urged nonessential business to remain

closed from May 1 to 5. Officials have also closed night clubs, theaters, museums and archaeological sites and urged people to avoid large gatherings. D.F. authorities ordered restaurants to cease all sit-down service.

Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard said Friday that the restrictions are working.

"Individuals and families have been taking these measures very seriously

and, as a result, we have had timely and early detection of cases of respiratory illnesses that could be of this type," he said. "This has led us to a situation where the numbers are getting better every day."

The city's health secretary said that no new suspected swine flu deaths had been reported in the capital in the past 24 hours, after three were reported Wednesday and one on Thursday.

However, Ebrard warned of a possible rebound effect and said he would wait to see a continuation of the trend before lifting restrictions.

"I'm not saying we should let our guard down," he said.

BUSINESS FEELS THE PINCH

Earlier in the week, official announcements that emphasized rising death tolls led panicked shoppers to deplete stores' supplies of over-the-counter flu medication, surgical masks, hand sanitizer and canned goods. Meanwhile, business groups complained that the restrictions were costing them hundreds of millions of pesos every day. A spokesman for the national restaurateurs' chamber told Notimex on Friday that the take-out-only measure in the capital had been a "failure," and that 99 percent of the city's more than 35,000 restaurants had simply closed up shop.

José Luis Juárez, 42, of the capital's Iztapalapa borough, agreed with many of the restrictions and advisories, saying that they made sense at the time. But he thought the forced economic slowdown had needlessly hurt entrepreneurs.

"These small businesses, many of them restaurants, will suffer in the long term," he said.

Polanco resident Irma Vela, 69, was less forgiving. "I think the government really overreacted," she said.

On Friday, the first day of the stepped-up shutdown, Mexico City's sidewalks were largely deserted, its shops were shuttered and its notorious traffic was light – a typical panorama on the May 1 national holiday.

But parks were empty and museums were closed. And in another sign that things were different this year, the city's typically raucous and overflowing Labor Day rallies in the Zócalo were replaced by mini-protests by radical teachers' groups, communists and sex workers – many wearing surgical masks, the local media reported.

MORE INSIDE: SOME CAPITAL RESIDENTS SPLIT TOWN, POLITICOS TAKE ADVANTAGE AND FLIGHTS ARE SCALED WAY BACK

MEXICO Local lab backlog blamed for slowing flu probe: **3**

WORLD Tourist from Mexico is Asia's first confirmed case: **7**

BUSINESS World airlines cut back on service to Mexico: **13**

SPORTS Chivas, San Luis games rejected by Colombia: **20**