

Was the Media's Swine Flu coverage justified?

For weeks, you couldn't get away from swine flu. It was everywhere. There were deaths, Mexico was at a standstill and travel was restricted to parts of the Yucatán peninsular.

Everyone was worried. There was an air of inevitability to the spread of swine flu... or so it seemed. But it soon became clear that the current swine flu epidemic was not the same as the 1918 Spanish flu. Of course it can still prove to be as devastating as its early 20th century counterpart, but for now its threat level has abated... substantially.

Why did the media make so much noise about the threat of swine flu? Over the same period of time thousands of people died of the normal seasonal flu as well as a number of other persistent human diseases. Why didn't these diseases get as much coverage?

Swine flu was new; we had no protection against it. Its potential was unknown, its capacity to cause devastation was a real possibility. But was this reason enough for the over-exaggerated coverage of the disease by the media?

The more cynical among us will be quick to point out that we are in the middle of 2009 and are currently undergoing a global recession. What could distract the masses more than the threat of a killer disease? What could invoke the fear of God more than the prospect of facing one's own mortality in light of a devastating, indiscriminate, rapidly transmitted disease?

But could this be true? Could the media have deliberately stoked-up the threat of swine flu to distract, confuse and upset their audience?

Possibly... but not likely.

Firstly, why would the media take such a course of action? Who would benefit the most? Surely not the media themselves, they've already taken some criticism for their over-exuberant coverage of the swine flu epidemic. The only ones that would benefit from such coverage are the major governments of the world, not necessarily the media themselves.

Secondly, what do we mean by the 'media'? Are we talking about one interconnected, interrelated conglomerate that are seemingly separate but in reality are one united global organization? There is no evidence to substantiate this idea and it smells too much of a conspiracy theory.

Why the media covered the swine flu epidemic the way they did was because they had no choice. If we remember back to early 2004 when cases of avian flu just

came to light we can see that the media coverage was just as intense. There are tragic historical reasons for not taking swine flu or any potential pandemic lightly.

Pandemics unlike diseases like cholera or malaria are not local and are not isolated to instances where an area suffers from poor hygiene. Pandemics are global. Anybody, anywhere can catch a disease that has reached true pandemic status. Millions, even billions of people could potentially be infected with the disease. The potential devastation of a major pandemic is phenomenal. The 1918 Spanish flu pandemic infected one third of the world's population and killed more than 50 million people. In the last century, pandemics killed more people than all the world's natural disasters put together. The scales of death caused by pandemics were comparable to those of world wars.

So in view of the potential of pandemics the media had no option but to cover the swine flu situation the way they did. The more informed we are, the more prepared we are and we can't be too informed when it comes to something as potentially dangerous as a new form of influenza.

Author: Jenny Saffie

Website: <http://www.swine-flu-facts.info>