

Israeli official: Swine flu name offensive

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JERUSALEM – The outbreak of swine flu should be renamed "Mexican" influenza in deference to Muslim and Jewish sensitivities over pork, said an Israeli health official Monday.

Deputy Health Minister Yakov Litzman said the reference to pigs is offensive to both religions and "we should call this Mexican flu and not swine flu," he told a news conference at a hospital in central Israel.

Both Judaism and Islam consider pigs unclean and forbid the eating of pork products.

Scientists are unsure where the new swine flu virus originally emerged, though it was identified first in the United States. They say there is nothing about the virus that makes it "Mexican" and worry such a label would be stigmatizing.

Two Israelis who recently visited Mexico have been hospitalized with symptoms of the flu. Health authorities have not yet confirmed whether they actually have the virus.

The current strain of swine flu is thought to have originated in Mexico where more than 100 people have been killed by the disease so far.

Laboratories in the U.S. and Canada have confirmed that of the samples tested so far, the swine flu virus in Mexico and U.S. appear to be the same.

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