



Swine flu expected in Svalbard

Locals returning from travels seen as main threat; officials ready, but limited in number and resources

Tens of thousands of tourists may not have infected Svalbard with A(H1N1) flu this summer, but officials say locals returning from travels are likely to bring the disease with them,

Tragedy and hope:
The legacy of 1918 Spanish flu epidemic in Svalbard

page 4

posing a greater risk due to their longer and more intimate contact with the community.

Preparations are underway, including vaccinating medical staff and contingency plans if the illness, also known as swine flu, cause a shortage of emergency personnel. The Svalbard governor's office is recommending "people who think or know that they are infected postpone their trip to Svalbard until they are symptom-free," but no official travel restrictions are in place or being recommended by health officials.



A poster in the waiting room at Longyearbyen Hospital offers basic safeguards to prevent flu infection. More information in English and Norwegian is available at www.pandemi.no.

See FLU, page 2



The *Petrozavodsk* remains stranded three months after running aground on the southern coast of Bear Island, with officials saying extensive damage and inhospitable shore geography makes the operation risky. Photo by the Norwegian Coastal Administration.

Remaining fuel drained from ship

'Ghost ship' remains on Bear Island three months after crew neglect led to grounding

The remaining fuel has been drained from a Russian ship nearly three months after it ran aground on the southern coast of Bear Island, but officials say removal of the vessel itself remains risky and don't know when it may occur.

The *Petrozavodsk* drifted astray and into

the coastline May 11, with the captain and first mate receiving prison sentences for neglectful behavior. Diesel spilled from the ship covered several kilometers of sea in the protected bird sanctuary, although officials say environmental damage appears minimal due to the easy-dispersing nature of the light fuel.

"It was like coming aboard a ghost ship," the NRK news agency reported this week,

See SHIPWRECK, page 3

Inside

- Headlines from Svalbardposten**
- A plum (tree) of a discovery by UNIS student
- Time for a late-summer cleaning, officials say
- New semester at UNIS starts with survival
- Page 3
- Weather forecast**
- Page 3
- Events calendar**
- Page 4



Gone to the movies

Icepeople will be at the Northern Traveling Film Festival in Barentsburg and Pyramiden from Aug. 14-20. The next print edition will be Aug. 25, but daily festival and other polar news updates will be at our blog at <http://coolestnewsonearth.blogspot.com> (or the "blog" link at www.icepeople.net).

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor
Mark Sabbatini

Copy editor
Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist
Irene Gallion

Mailing address
Icepeople
Vei 210 -2- 13
Longyearbyen, Svalbard
9170
Norway

Telephone
Norway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

E-mail
marksabbatini@yahoo.com

Web site
www.icepeople.net

Icepeople is published weekly (or thereabouts) on Tuesdays (or thereabouts), with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

Copyright stuff

Original contents of this publication can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes free of charge if *Icepeople* is credited as the source. The original writers, photographers and other contributors retain their rights to all published works.

Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

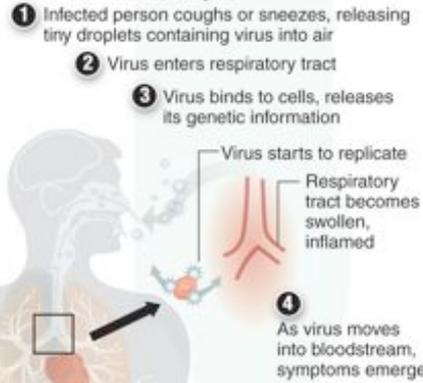
Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

Is it the flu, or is it a cold?

Flu is often confused with the common cold, but flu symptoms typically develop more quickly and are more severe than those of a cold.

How the flu infects you



How to compare symptoms

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Head	Headache rare	Achy
Nose	Runny, sneezing	Stuffy sometimes
Throat	Sore	Sore sometimes
Chest	Severe or hacking cough	Dry cough; can become severe
Appetite	Normal	Decreased
Muscles	Fine	Achy
Onset	Slow	Sudden
Body temperature	Low or no fever, no chills	High fever (over 102°F), chills
Fatigue	Mild	Severe; can last two to three weeks

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

© 2009 MCT

Vaccines may start arriving in October

FLU, from page 1

There were 162,380 laboratory-confirmed cases of the flu and 1,154 deaths as of Aug. 4, according to the World Health Organization, although actual numbers are believed to be somewhat higher. The totals are low compared to the average of 3 million to 5 million flu cases causing up to 500,000 deaths annually, but the potential infection rate and severity of H1N1 has many areas taking extraordinary measures.

Schools, colleges and cinema halls in India's commercial capital of Mumbai, for instance, have been ordered to shut for three to seven days after federal health officials reported 1,078 people of 5,000 nationwide tested positive for H1N1. China has imposed quarantines in infected areas and the U.S., one of the hardest-hit countries, is preparing its largest vaccination campaign in at least 50 years as it expects a second wave of infections as students return to school.

An international youth camp in the western Norwegian town of Gloppen was shut down in late July when 37 of 1,700 partici-

pants developed H1N1 flu symptoms. All six Norwegian border guard stations on the Norwegian-Russian border have also been isolated after 50 of 600 personnel were infected.

There were about 200 confirmed cases of swine flu in 18 of Norway's 19 counties at the end of July, according to the Norwegian Health Directorate.

Tourists, researchers and others have been arriving in Svalbard in large numbers since March, when the virus was originally detected in Mexico, but a visitor is a lower risk than locals residents who have been in other countries for several weeks, stated Trond Egil Hansen, a doctor at Longyearbyen Hospital, in an e-mail interview.

"The locals that return from holiday are supposed to be in tighter contact with other locals living in Longyearbyen," he wrote. "The risk of transmitting A(H1N1) is regarded as greater when you are living together and working together than having tourists walking around."

A concern is the limited number of medical and aviation workers in Longyearbyen, and what happens if they become ill. Hansen said. But the hospital is prepared to deal with cases locally unless they become severe.

"If someone gets seriously ill and is in need of treatment with respirator for some time they will have to be transferred to Tromsø," he wrote. "Anyone infected and not seriously ill would be recommended to stay at home and minimize contact with others."

But Hansen said those experiencing symptoms such as high fever, coughing and muscle ache should be tested at the hospital for the virus.

Vaccinations are expected to be available by the beginning of October, but initially only in limited quantities, Hansen added.

"We are expected from the health authorities to give highest priority to those who will have to deal with the ill," he wrote. "That is not only the hospital staff, but also some important collaboration partners. Next will be those at risk of complicated flu, which includes some chronic diseases such as heart and lung disease, and diabetes."

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Busking in the limelight



Dag Magne Hellimo, left, and Jacoba Waksvik of Senja play traditional folk music on accordions for spare change outside of Lompensenteret late Sunday afternoon. They also performed informally during their holiday cruise on Spitsbergen.

Weather bad for rescue, but good for birds

SHIPWRECK, from page 1

based on an interview with Knut Arnhus of the Norwegian Coastal Administration. "There are food leftovers on the plates. In the cabin are the photos of the families of the sailors."

The NCA, in a prepared statement, said removal of oil from the ship by the company Titan Salvage was completed Aug. 5. The operation started July 18, but was temporarily halted four days later due to poor weather.

"The Norwegian Coastal Administration and the Coast Guard has inspected on board and established that the potential pollution sources are now removed," the NCA statement notes.

The seabird colonies on the southern part of the island are considered among the largest in the northern hemisphere, with some areas of the sanctuary populated by up to 50 birds per square meter of land. NCA officials said the poor weather may have been a blessing for the wildlife due to the lack of human activity.

"Researchers at the Institute says that it appears that the incident with *Petrozavodsk* has had little impact on the environment," the agency's statement notes. "There has been a

good nesting season for birds."

The ship's owner has been ordered to remove the vessel, but "it is regardless a very difficult and risky operation," Arnhus told NRK. He said he is not certain the removal can be completed this year.

The *Petrozavodsk* was carrying 30 cubic meters of oil divided into four containers. The initial spill covered about a three-kilometer-wide area of sea, but subsequent slow leaks continued to be reported for several weeks afterward.

Norwegian officials investigated the crew after satellite tracking indicated the vessel kept a steady course in its collision with the shore. The captain of the *Petrozavodsk* was sentenced to 18 days in jail for drinking on duty, while the first mate received a 40-day sentence for drinking and falling asleep while on watch.

The Norwegian Coast Guard's ship identification system on the north end of the island lacked the range to detect the *Petrozavodsk* was off course and harsh weather kept officials from reaching the collision site for 20 hours. Recommendations for improving monitoring and response are under consideration.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

A plum (tree) of a discovery by UNIS student in Svea

A master's student at The University Centre In Svalbard has made the unusual discovery of two small fruit trees sprouting in Svea. Bente Sved Skottvoll found them while participating in a vegetation study, with field researchers sending photos by mobile phone to colleagues who said they are likely plum trees. Both trees



have been potted for preservation, but some at UNIS are worried they may be smuggled. "It's very cool to have a tree from Svalbard in the garden," wrote Professor Pernille Bronken Eidsen in an e-mail from the field study.

Time for a late-summer cleaning, officials declare

A challenge to clean up litter, wrecked equipment and other junk this month is being made by Longyearbyen and Store Norske officials. Rusty jugs, wood pallets, inoperative snowscooters and other waste are still scattered around the city despite an effort earlier this year that received a "lukewarm reception." Terje Carlsen, communications manager for Store Norske, said now may be an opportune time with people returning from travels and "it is important that we get it done before the snow comes."

New semester starts at UNIS

Nearly 400 students began attending lectures Monday at The University Center In Svalbard. Administrative Director Gunnar Sand said there are two to three applications for each vacancy, compared to three years ago when all eligible applicants were accepted. Mandatory Arctic survival training has already started. "They go around in the hallways with their survival suits on," Sand said.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday

Mostly sunny and calm winds; increasing clouds overnight. High 4C (4C wind chill), low 0C (0C wind chill).

Thursday

Low clouds. SE winds at 4 km/h. High 2C (2C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

Friday

Low clouds. SE winds at 4 km/h. High 3C (3C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

Saturday

Low clouds. S winds at 6 km/h. High 3C (3C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, partly sunny, 4C (4C), 0C (-2C); Monday, chilly with wet snow, 1C (-1C), 1C (1C); Tuesday, partly sunny, 2C (2C), 0C (-1C); Wednesday, clouds and sun, 6C (4C), 3C (1C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



A black headstone and seven crosses at the rear of Longyearbyen Cemetery, above, marks a row of graves for the coal miners who died here during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. The town and a coal mining installation are shown at right in a photo from that year. Canadian researcher and author Kirsty Duncan led a 1998 scientific expedition to examine the bodies to determine if the virus had been preserved by the Arctic climate and if anything could be learned as a result.



1918 flu epidemic brought tragedy, hope of finding answers to Svalbard

Death of seven miners led to expedition to see if cause of rapid spread could be learned

When one of the world's worst epidemics struck nearly a century ago, those living in the Arctic were hit especially hard. And in the graves of seven coal miners who died in Svalbard, there was once hope of finding clues to keep it from happening again.

The Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 killed 20 million to 40 million people worldwide, compared to 28 million who died in the two world wars and an estimated 25 million who died during the Black Death in the mid-13th century. Medical science was at a loss to explain the Spanish flu's rapid spread which resulted in 7,300 deaths and 370,000 infections in Norway.

Dozens of Svalbard residents fell ill during the summer of 1918 and a few deaths were reported, but the miners came on the last ship carrying workers from Tromsø that year.

"The ship left Tromsø on 21 September 1918 for Longyear City with sixty-nine healthy, young people," wrote Sigurd Vestbyes Dagboker in a diary kept by Store Norske. "All of them fell ill during the two-day crossing, but none of the crew succumbed to Spanish flu, as they had all been sick with flu earlier that summer."

The men were 18 to 29 years old, the typical age range of flu victims, and were farmers and fishermen from the mainland hoping to earn

extra money as miners during the winter. But they died during the first week of October and were buried Oct. 27 in a row of graves still in place today.

Excerpts from Dagboker's diary are captured in the 2003 book "Hunting The 1918 Flu: One Scientist's Search For A Killer Virus" by Kirsty Duncan, a Canadian specialist in medical geography and Liberal Party politician. She led a multinational scientific expedition to Svalbard in August 1998 to dig up the graves and examine six of the seven bodies (permission was not obtained for the other's family), hoping the Arctic environment might have preserved clues about the virus not possible in warmer areas. The project coincided with research being done on victims in Arctic Alaska and other areas where the disease spread.

Tissues from the victims' lungs, intestines and other organs were collected once they were located using ground-penetrating radar, according to a *New York Times* account.

"The bodies, which were not embalmed, will not be thawed or taken from the grave, both out of respect and as a precaution against the spread of any infectious material," the article notes. "The scientists seriously doubt that any of the flu virus will still be alive, but just in case, each will be wearing a modified space suit with self-contained breathing apparatus."

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

Aug. 14-20

Northern Traveling Film Festival in Barentsburg and Pyramiden. Movies, tours and discussions about history, politics and science. More information at www.norfest.ru.

Aug. 16

8 p.m.: Movie: "Drag Me To Hell," U.S. horror/thriller, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Aug. 23

6 p.m.: Movie: "Coraline And The Secret Door," U.S. animated fantasy, ages 11 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Last Chance Harvey," U.S. drama, all ages. Huset.

Aug. 27

2 p.m.: Meeting of cultural and leisure enterprise board. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Aug. 28

9 a.m.: Meeting of the board of enterprise growth. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Aug. 30

7 p.m.: Movie: "Harry And The Half-Blood Prince," British adventure/family, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Sept. 3

6 p.m.: Activity Fair. Information about activities offered for kids, students and adults by various organizations in Longyearbyen. Coffee and waffles will also be sold. Svalbardhallen.

Sept. 6

6 p.m.: Movie: "Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs," U.S. family, ages 7 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Hauntings In Connecticut," U.S. thriller/horror, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Sept. 7

10:15 a.m.: Meeting of the environment and industry committee, Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *ATP: Svalbard warms 3-5°C since 1990*
- *Arctic ice melt may set record*
- *Nazi sympathizer honored in N. Norway*
- *Cloud-making ships to fight warming?*