

# FERNANDO ALVAREZ DEL RIO

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Fernando Alvarez del Rio, we're going to open the discussion to the floor, but first tell us how a country of 100 million people handles the shock when a new, unfamiliar virus appears which it's not prepared for. How did you go about it? Of course, we saw Mexico City become a ghost town, people wearing masks and then the flu spreading to others across the globe. What are the first steps? What do you do to avoid becoming panicked and to avoid panicking the population? What lesson can we all learn from this experience?

## Fernando Alvarez del Rio

When the epidemic started in April of last year, one of the main things was that we already had certain protocols in place and that was very useful. These were protocols that obliged you to inform and to make sure of your diagnoses and so on. The other aspect was that there was an incredible amount of presence of mind, especially from the Minister, so as not to create panic among the public. At the time, what we were worried about was the H5N1, not this version. The possibilities and the implications were very far-reaching. In the end everything went really fast.

One issue that was raised, which is really important, is that of epidemiological surveillance. Indeed, one of the things that we have is an amazing amount of investment in terms of being able to prepare and detect. We can also be much more precise and fast. This is not only at the central level, but in every state. That is something that we agree is of the most relevance in terms of global or regional epidemiological surveillance. We will avoid a negative situation and we will be prepared to take immediate and fast action.

There are other aspects related to that. People were taking a long time to get to the hospitals at the beginning and that is a major problem. I did not think that was ever going to happen again in Mexico. The amount of awareness that is in the population after this first intervention and this discussion is incredible. That should not be happening.

We are now preparing in many ways. Yesterday, there was this event with the President and the Minister, precisely because of this collaboration. It is for the development and production regarding influenza, both the ordinary C-strain influenza and H1N1, in conjunction with Sanofi Aventis. In that respect, we are really happy that we are much more prepared.

What we want to do and what is very important is that that goes in a global way. We think that in a global way, in some instances, what we have to do is to work at the regional level. For example, there is this idea regarding these Americans in Central America. I do not want to repeat myself. There are many issues that we could spill over very fast unless we have a grip on them right away.

I would just like to raise another issue. On the other hand, talking about prevention, I think there is a very interesting issue. There could be a parallel between all the implications for health and all the implications for the environment. There are many prevention strategies nowadays, especially in Mexico. One of the key concerns, not only in Mexico, is obesity. We have the highest infant rates of obesity; the second one in ALO. This situation is present in many countries. That is one of the many issues that were covered in the recent meeting of Health Ministers at the OECD.

The issue is that many of these actions go beyond the health sector. There are many aspects that are intersecting; there are many aspects that relate to agreements with industry. That is where global governance also comes into play. You have to have a perspective that is going to be global, but that is going to end up in specific solutions at the conflict base. Once you get into specific solutions, the main topic is; how do you make healthy choices the easy choice for populations?

In a sense, many of the aspects have to do with environment. When it comes to the populations, how do you make the green choice the easy choice? In Mexico, as was mentioned, there are a lot of subsidies and programmes in terms of energy consumption in appliances like refrigerators. There is the green voltage, in terms of having houses that are more environmentally-friendly. There is the idea of public transport; how can you make a choice about using your private car if you do not have good transportation? A lot of the circumstances relate to how to make the situation easier.