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Expert: Dutch-Created Avian Flu Could Spell Disaster if Weaponized by Terrorists

Scientists in Holland announced they modified the deadly H5N1 avian influenza virus so that it can be easily transmitted from person to person. They now want to publish the details on how they did it, much to the concern of the U.S. government. A Texas Tech University expert in vector-borne infectious diseases can discuss why there should be cause

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Expert

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Talking Points

Prior to this announcement, H5N1 influenza was believed transmissible only through close contact with birds. Bioweapon engineers have been creating weapons out of pathogens for some time. To weaponize a pathogen, two keys include making it more easily delivered and making it more infectious.

While scientists may have modified the virus to be more easily transmissible from person to person, no information is out yet if the modifications also altered the virus' virulence on humans.

Quotes

"Everyone expected it was just a matter of time before a shift in the H5N1 virus would occur and infection could happen person-to-person. One or two amino acids in the genetic code could make the virus easily transmissible from human to human."

“With the flu, if there’s four- to eight-day incubation post-exposure, then this could be the walking vector nightmare everyone’s worried about. Especially if the scenario is infecting people by putting them on airplanes and flying them into the major populated areas of the world. They can mingle with thousands of people. It’s worse than any conventional or nuclear weapon. People will be getting people sick before you know what’s really happened.”
“It’s not time to panic, but it’s time to be concerned until the rest of the story is known.”



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