



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

# NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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## WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION TO HOST INFLUENZA PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS MEETING

**Geneva** - Poultry culling and other measures may have reduced the likelihood of a human pandemic influenza strain emerging soon from Asia as a consequence of avian flu. However, experts believe that because these outbreaks come in cycles, a human influenza pandemic must still be expected at some time in the future.

To prepare for the next pandemic, the World Health Organization is convening a meeting of more than 100 health experts from 16 to 18 March 2004 in Geneva. The purpose of the meeting is to assess the current situation, and to analyse possible public health interventions before and during an influenza pandemic.

"As long as avian and human flu viruses are circulating in the environment, the ingredients for a human pandemic still exist. When the next pandemic emerges, we will be able to respond properly only if we prepare properly," said WHO's Director-General LEE Jong-wook.

While recent efforts to control the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in chickens appear to have had some success in Thailand, Viet Nam, China and elsewhere, ongoing outbreaks reinforce the historical experience that elimination of the virus will likely take years. During that time, a random mutation of the virus or a combination of avian influenza with human influenza could produce a strain which moves easily from person to person and produces high mortality. Such a random event could occur at any time.

Slowing the spread of a pandemic and reducing its impact will require planning, preparation and global co-ordination. Therefore, WHO has invited specialists who have expertise in public health, health policy, hospital management, drugs and vaccines, infection control measures, disease modelling, and risk communications to identify practical response measures.

The experts will also discuss the best use of limited supplies of vaccines and antivirals, as well as surveillance strategies to detect a new pandemic early and monitor its spread. Other topics to be discussed include an appraisal of the current risk, travel recommendations and early detection of changes in influenza subtypes.

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For more information about the meeting please contact WHO's Communicable Diseases media officers Maria Cheng at 4122 791 3982 and [chengm@who.int](mailto:chengm@who.int) or Dick Thompson at 4122 791 2684 or [thompsond@who.int](mailto:thompsond@who.int). All WHO Press releases, fact sheets and other information can be found at [www.who.int](http://www.who.int).