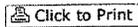




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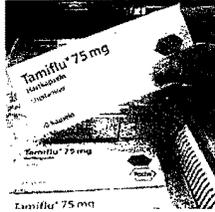


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Bird flu shows resistance to drug

By Anita Manning, USA TODAY

The strain of flu scientists fear could spark a pandemic is showing signs of becoming resistant to an antiviral drug being stockpiled around the world, a warning that drugs being stored by governments might not be as strong a defense as hoped, flu experts say.



Tamiflu is one of two medications that appear effective against bird flu, but a new report suggests otherwise.

By Daniel Maurer, AP

Tamiflu is one of just two antiviral medications that appear to be effective against the bird flu strain known as H5N1, which has circulated in Asia for nearly two years. Scientists report in the journal *Nature* that virus samples taken from a Vietnamese girl in February were found to be resistant to the drug.

Researcher Yoshihiro Kawaoka, a virologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Tokyo, says the results highlight the "need to do more basic research" to find other drugs effective against flu viruses.

Kawaoka found that 60% of the virus samples from the girl's blood were highly resistant to Tamiflu. Higher doses were effective in wiping out the virus, researchers found, and the girl has recovered. The virus was not resistant to another antiviral, Relenza.

The report, which is being published in the Oct. 20 issue of the journal, was posted online Friday because of its relevance to preparations for a pandemic that scientists fear could emerge if the avian strain develops the ability to easily infect humans and spread.

Kawaoka says this does not suggest that governments should stop stockpiling Tamiflu. "This is just one case," he says. "The vast majority of H5N1 viruses out there are still very sensitive. We should stick to the plan but perhaps consider also stockpiling (Relenza)."

Many countries are doing that, though in smaller amounts than Tamiflu. The U.S.

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Department of Health and Human Services has ordered 4.3 million courses of Tamiflu and 84,300 of Relenza. Tamiflu is the more popular choice for stockpiling because it is a tablet. Relenza is an inhaled powder and more complicated to administer in an emergency, says infectious-disease specialist Brian Currie of Montefiore Medical Center in New York.

The emergence of drug-resistant strains of the H5N1 virus is "ominous," Currie says. "It's not surprising though, given that the drug has been used extensively during the outbreak in the area." But, he says: "There really is no surveillance system looking for this. One of the things this article highlights is that we have to start looking."

Too much reliance on Tamiflu as a defense against the H5N1 flu could be a mistake, says Michael Osterholm of the University of Minnesota. Tests in animals suggest that unless the drug is taken before exposure to the virus, it might not be effective, he says.

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