

Evening News

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Bird flu drug effectiveness fear after two victims die

NEW doubts over the drug used to combat bird flu emerged today as two people died after failing to respond to the treatment.

A study of 13 Vietnamese patients infected with the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu found two developed a rapid resistance to the anti-viral drug, Tamiflu, which led to their deaths.

Medical experts have described the report published by scientists in the New England Journal of Medicine as "frightening".

Governments around the world are stockpiling Tamiflu amid fears that bird flu will mutate into a form that is more easily spread between humans, leading to a pandemic.

The news comes as the World Health Organisation (WHO) today confirmed that a 39-year-old man and an eight-year-old boy died earlier this month of bird flu, raising Indonesia's toll to 11. The victims, who were not related, both died in the capital Jakarta.



The H5N1 virus has so far killed 71 people in south east Asia.

The Department of Health is stockpiling 14.6 million courses of Tamiflu, which was hoped would shorten the length of illness and reduce the symptoms.

Researchers at the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit working in Vietnam also warned that other anti-viral drugs apart from Tamiflu may be needed.

And they fear that people taking the wrong dose of Tamiflu may add to the growth of a resistant strain of the virus.

Leading virologist Sir John Skehel, director of the National Institute for Medical Research in London, urged the Government to broaden the UK's defence by looking at other options, such as the inhaled drug Relenza.

And Professor Anne Moscona of Cornell University in New York said Tamiflu-resistant H5N1 "is now a reality" after studying the journal's report.

She said: "This frightening report should inspire us to devise pandemic strategies that do not favour the development of Tamiflu-resistant strains.

The Scottish Executive previously announced plans to buy 1.2 million doses of Tamiflu - enough to allow one person in four to be treated - and has stood by its estimates.

Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en)
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en>

- [WHO - Bird Flu fact sheet](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/)
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wisegeek.com
