

THE SCOTSMAN
Sat 22 Oct 2005



A rooster in Turkey, where vets have slaughtered more than 9,000 birds in a bid to contain the avian flu virus.

Picture: AFP/ Getty Images

Plea for help to fast-track bird flu vaccine

LOUISE GRAY

BRITISH scientists are working on a radical vaccine that could protect the entire population within three months of a flu pandemic hitting the country.

The DNA-based vaccine would take just a week to develop once the strain of the deadly flu emerged.

It would then take little more than two months to manufacture the vaccine and distribute it to the whole population, half the time it would take to develop and distribute existing types of vaccine.

Dr Clive Dix, head of PowderMed, which is working with University College, London researchers, claimed the vaccine could be ready in two years with help from the government.

He said: "We are convinced this will be part of the government's armament because of the ease of manufacture and because it is far more reliable."

The Department of Health, which is in charge of procuring a vaccine for the whole of the UK, said: "We have been in talks with PowderMed. The technology is very promising but is in the early stages of development."

EU in funding plan

THE European Commission is considering setting aside a €1 billion (£677 million) "solidarity fund" to be used in the event of a human flu pandemic.

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The money would be used for antiviral drugs and vaccines to help combat a potentially deadly outbreak.

European Commissioner for Health Markos Kyprianou said the fund had not been finalised and would have to be agreed upon by the 25 member states.

"In case of a pandemic, it will finance the use or replacement of anti-virals or vaccines," he said.

The financial announcement emerged as part of two days of informal talks between EU health ministers in Hertfordshire.

Elsewhere, a Thai boy tested positive for bird flu yesterday, but doctors said he was recovering and there was no sign he caught the virus from his infected father, who died earlier this week, calming fears of a human pandemic.

Ronarit Benpad, seven, who was treated with anti-flu drug Tamiflu in the early stages of his infection, had recovered his appetite and his temperature had returned to normal, although he would remain under observation for two weeks, doctors said.

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/)
http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/

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Last updated: 21-Oct-05 23:44 GMT

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