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MAY 2006

PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.  
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

# Covering the Pandemic Flu Threat

## TRACKING ARTICLES AND SOME KEY EVENTS: 1997 TO 2005

### 1997 165 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- The H5N1 flu virus, previously only seen in birds, is detected in a young boy in Hong Kong in May.<sup>1</sup>
- In November and December, newspapers widely begin to document the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and National Institutes of Health (NIH) efforts to investigate and control the new flu strain.<sup>2</sup>
- By the end of the year, 20 suspected cases are reported tied to the H5N1 strain of the virus.<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong officials announce they will slaughter all 1.3 million chickens within a day and a half.<sup>4</sup>
- A new study investigating the lung tissue of a 1918 flu pandemic victim, which killed 500,000 Americans and 50 million worldwide, by Armed Forces Institute of Pathology finds the virus had been transmitted from birds to pigs to humans and was based on a novel strain of the flu.<sup>5</sup>

### 1998 239 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- In January, the *New York Times* reports that “surprisingly” neither the U.S. government nor the WHO have final plans to counter a pandemic, despite warnings that “an influenza pandemic rivaling one that killed more than 21 million people worldwide in 1918 and 1919 could strike without warning.”<sup>6</sup>
- Reports continue early in the year about scientific efforts to research and contain the H5N1 outbreak.<sup>7</sup>
- A number of articles appear throughout the year about the ongoing Armed Forces Institute of Pathology investigations into the 1918 flu pandemic studies and about the nature of and research into pandemics.<sup>8</sup>
- In December, the *Associated Press* reports that the WHO praises Hong Kong for acting quickly to slaughter poultry to contain the threat and that no human cases of the virus have been reported since the slaughter.<sup>9</sup>



## 1999 226 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- The President's budget includes a request for a 19 percent increase for CDC to "track and prevent emerging infectious diseases, like the threat of a flu pandemic."<sup>10</sup>
- The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and other studies of the 1918 pandemic continue to receive some media coverage.<sup>11</sup>
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves Relenza as a treatment for flu.
- In May, the *Associated Press* reports that CDC officials warn that H5N1 could still be considered a threat.<sup>12</sup>
- The book, *Flu : The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It*, by *New York Times* reporter Gina Kolata is released.<sup>13</sup>

## 2000 225 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology reports further evidence that the 1918 pandemic originated in birds.<sup>14</sup>
- Reports of a new flu treatment drug tentatively called RWJ-270201 emerge.<sup>15</sup>
- In October 2000, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO – formerly the General Accounting Office) issues a report, "Influenza Pandemic: Plan Needed for Federal and State Response."<sup>16</sup>

## 2001 188 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- A *New England Journal of Medicine* study on the Japanese policy from 1962 to 1994 to mass vaccinate children against the flu annually finds that deaths across the population attributed to flu and pneumonia plummeted.<sup>17</sup>
- Some coverage appears of debates around a study published in *Science* that hypothesized a recombination of genes in the 1918 pandemic outbreak.<sup>18</sup>
- A number of articles appear after September 11, 2001 and the anthrax attacks relating the threat of a pandemic flu outbreak to bioterrorism.<sup>19</sup>

## 2002 149 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- A new book *Secret Agents: The Menace of Emerging Infections* by Madeline Drexler is published, which looks in part at the relative threats of natural infectious diseases and bioterrorism.<sup>20</sup>
- An article in the *Washington Post* examines the U.S. policy and activities around the "swine flu" in the mid-1970s in relationship to current bioterrorism and infectious disease preparedness efforts.<sup>21</sup>
- Additional articles discuss the threat of the pandemic in the context of bioterrorism and other public health preparedness efforts.<sup>22</sup>

## 2003 746 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- In February, human cases of influenza A H5N1 are discovered in a family from Hong Kong who had recently traveled to China's Fujian province.<sup>23</sup>
- In March, a new respiratory illness, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is detected, igniting concern in the scientific community that it could spark a pandemic outbreak.<sup>24</sup>
- Numerous articles appear relating SARS identification and containment to the threat of a flu pandemic.<sup>25</sup>
- The annual flu strain in the U.S. is more severe than in many years and in some coverage is discussed in context of how the annual flu is different than the novel strain of a pandemic flu.<sup>26</sup>
- Flu strain H7N7 is identified in the Netherlands with over 80 human cases, leading to the slaughter of 11 million chickens in the Netherlands and half a million in Belgium.<sup>27</sup>
- Articles also continue to examine pandemic flu in relation to bioterrorism preparedness.<sup>28</sup>
- The President requests \$100 million in his budget proposal toward researching a pandemic flu vaccine.<sup>29</sup>

## 2004 1,669 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- By the end of January, at least 12 human deaths are linked to the H5N1 "bird flu" in Asia, and H5N1 is detected in birds in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.<sup>30</sup>
- The WHO publicly expresses concern about the "simultaneous appearance of an avian influenza virus in a number of countries."<sup>31</sup> A number of Asian countries report attempts to slaughter or contain infected birds.<sup>32</sup>
- Researchers at the Scripps Institute in La Jolla, Calif., and Britain's Medical Research Council, find that the 1918 pandemic was likely linked more closely to an avian form of flu than previously thought.<sup>33</sup>
- A new book by historian and journalist John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague In History* is published.<sup>34</sup>
- In August, HHS releases the draft of a national Pandemic Influenza Response and Preparedness Plan, open for public comment.<sup>35</sup>
- An Institute of Medicine (IOM) report issued in November details a pandemic scenario based on the 1968 flu strain, where up to 207,000 people could die of the flu in the USA along with 733,000 hospitalizations and 42 million people treated as outpatients.<sup>36</sup> The WHO warns that a pandemic based on a highly severe strain, like H5N1, could kill up to 100 million worldwide in a worst-case scenario, and could infect 25 percent of countries' populations.<sup>37</sup>
- Former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson said as he is leaving office in December, "Two things really worry me most.... The big one is pandemic flu. We don't have a vaccine and we don't have a therapy."<sup>38</sup>
- A number of articles emerge relating the lack of vaccine for and capacity to develop a pandemic to the shortage of vaccine for the annual flu,<sup>39</sup> and other articles continue to examine the pandemic in relationship to bioterrorism and public health preparedness.<sup>40</sup>
- By the end of the year, 32 human deaths are attributed to the H5N1 bird flu.<sup>41</sup>





## 2005 8,698 U.S. newspaper and wire service articles

- In January, an editorial by WHO official Klaus Stohr in the *New England Journal of Medicine* warns “all the elements are in place for the start of a global flu pandemic,” except human-to-human transmission.<sup>42</sup>
- Vietnam reports 12 human deaths from H5N1 in January<sup>43</sup> and asks for assistance from the international health community.<sup>44</sup>
- In February, CDC Director Julie Gerberding addresses the American Association for the Advancement of Science, stating that “the science here is all alerting us that we have a great deal to be concerned about,” and outlining concerns about current U.S. vaccine production capacity.<sup>45</sup>
- WHO official in charge of affected Western Pacific region says the “world is now in the gravest possible danger of a pandemic.”<sup>46</sup>
- In March, clinical trials for an experimental H5N1 vaccine begin in several universities in the United States.<sup>47</sup>
- In April, President Bush signs an executive order authorizing the use of quarantine in the United States to deal with any lethal strain of flu.<sup>48</sup>
- A private laboratory accidentally sends samples of the 1957 pandemic strain to nearly 4,000 laboratories worldwide, causing international health officials to scramble to locate and destroy each sample.<sup>49</sup>
- In May, the GAO provides testimony, “Influenza Pandemic: Challenges Remain in Preparedness,” and in November, “Influenza Pandemic: Applying Lessons from the 2004-05 Influenza Vaccine Shortage,” before the U.S. Congress.<sup>50</sup>
- A new book, *Monster at Our Door: The Threat of Avian Flu*, by MacArthur fellow Mike Davis is published.<sup>51</sup>
- In June, Trust for America’s Health releases “A Killer Flu?” which provides an overview of the pandemic threat, analyses of preparedness efforts at the state and federal levels, and projections of state and national death and hospitalizations based on CDC’s FluAid modeling tool.<sup>52</sup>
- The House of Representatives, Government Reform Committee holds a hearing focusing on the lack of vaccine and antiviral supplies for a pandemic.<sup>53</sup>
- In July, research published in both *Nature* and *Science* determines that the H5N1 strain is circulating among migratory birds, raising fears of the strain’s imminent worldwide spread.<sup>54</sup>
- Federal list of priority populations for receipt of vaccine, such as front-line health workers, outlined in anticipation of final release of federal pandemic preparedness plan.<sup>55</sup>
- In August, NIH announces the successful testing of a vaccine designed for the H5N1 strain. However, worldwide vaccine production capabilities remain limited and distribution mechanisms unproven.<sup>56</sup>
- Continued spread of H5N1 strain among bird populations from Asia to Siberia threatens Europe and Africa and worries health officials.<sup>57</sup>
- In September, the U.S. Senate passes a nearly \$4 billion amendment to the FY 2006 Department of Defense appropriations bill for pandemic flu preparations.<sup>58</sup>

- A WHO flu spokesperson estimates that 7.4 million deaths is the most realistic worldwide death total should a pandemic strain of avian influenza emerge. Days earlier, the U.N. Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza projected a potential death toll ranging from 5 to 150 million.<sup>59</sup>
- In October, the journals *Nature* and *Science* publish findings that the deadly 1918 pandemic strain has been reconstructed and determined to be a bird flu strain that spread directly to humans.<sup>60</sup>
- The U.S. State Department hosts officials from over 80 nations to discuss national and international strategies to combat the H5N1 strain and a possible pandemic.<sup>61</sup>
- HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt embarks on a fact-finding trip to several H5N1-stricken nations in Southeast Asia. Leavitt says “the big lesson I learned from Hurricane Katrina is that we have to be thinking about the unthinkable, because sometimes the unthinkable happens.”<sup>62</sup>
- In November, President Bush makes a public address at NIH that outlines the threat of pandemic flu, unveils the administration’s proposed national strategy document to combat a pandemic, and calls upon Congress to allocate \$7.1 billion to support preparedness activities.<sup>63</sup>
- HHS releases the updated Pandemic Influenza Plan to guide health response efforts throughout the United States.<sup>64</sup>
- In December, the White House convenes a “tabletop” exercise to test federal government’s response plans and capabilities for a pandemic emergence.<sup>65</sup>
- President Bush signs legislation allocating \$3.8 billion for pandemic flu preparations.<sup>66</sup>



The numbers of articles were determined by a Nexis search of U.S. newspapers and wire services with stories containing the words “pandemic” and “flu” or “influenza” in each month from January 1997 to December 2005. The totals do not include the same article that may run in multiple media outlets, such as an *Associated Press* article, which may run in multiple newspapers or publications.

The key event highlights were selected through a review of articles with “pandemic” and “flu” or “influenza” appearing in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Associated Press*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

**2005 Total: 8698**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
129	234	230	383	161	169	239	294	452	2365	2687	1355

**2004 Total: 1669**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
189	207	77	24	35	33	39	100	124	333	296	212

**2003 Total: 746**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
31	12	95	136	86	30	13	7	16	41	57	222

**2002 Total: 149**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
8	12	12	8	8	3	10	11	15	22	11	17

**2001 Total: 188**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
7	16	13	13	13	5	4	7	21	39	40	10

**2000 Total: 225**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
66	15	5	13	17	3	8	3	35	24	20	16

**1999 Total: 226**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
18	59	15	12	16	5	12	10	15	27	31	46

**1998 Total: 239**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
57	51	16	4	10	13	2	17	18	14	23	14

**1997 Total: 165**

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
5	0	21	9	0	2	3	7	2	21	14	81

# Endnotes

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