

Masks not top flu fighter

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As the discussion over a bird flu pandemic increases, U.S. health experts say surgical masks and similar devices will be of little help.

The 12-member panel issued a report Thursday, requested by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Washington Post reports.

It a telephone press conference, panel member Dr. John C. Bailar said, "I would not recommend that anyone using a mask think that is adequate protection."

He said masks are part of an overall response to a flu pandemic, which includes vaccines, placing patients in quarantine and shutting down open places like schools.

The various types of masks may be helpful in preventing sick people from breathing the virus into the air and healthy people from inhaling it.

Options include the general surgical masks, made of a cloth-like material covering the nose and mouth with straps that go around the head.

Then there are more advanced, form-fitting respirators that are better filters but cost much more.

Health experts fear the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu that has killed more than 100 people and millions of birds in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East will mutate into one more easily spread among humans.

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