

St. Jude bird flu vaccine test successful

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U.S. scientists say a commercially developed vaccine has successfully protected mice and ferrets against a highly lethal avian influenza virus.

The research, conducted at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., involved a vaccine developed by Vical Inc. of San Diego, Calif.

Richard Webby, an assistant faculty member in St. Jude's infectious diseases department, said the finding, coupled with results of previous studies, suggests such a vaccine would protect humans against multiple variants of the bird and human influenza viruses, including the H5N1 virus that might mutate so it can spread readily from person to person.

Flu experts and public health officials fear such an H5N1 variant would trigger a human pandemic.

Webby was to present the study Wednesday in Denver, Colo., during a U.S. Public Health Service Professional Conference.

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