

CDC seeks bird flu diagnostic tests

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The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has awarded \$11.4 million for development of new, rapid diagnostic tests for avian influenza.

The CDC said the contracts went to four companies working to develop diagnostic tests that physicians and field epidemiologists could use to quickly and accurately test patients for avian influenza H5N1 and other emerging viruses, receiving results within 30 minutes.

In providing the funding, the CDC said it hopes commercialization of the products can occur within two to three years.

Existing point-of-care tests can only determine if the patient is infected with seasonal influenza viruses A or B, but cannot identify avian influenza H5N1. To test for H5N1, patient samples currently must be sent to one of about 100 designated labs nationwide that can perform specialized testing. The process can take four to 24 hours to complete, depending on shipping of samples.

The companies receiving CDC funding are Cepheid Inc. of Sunnyvale, Calif.; Iqum Inc. of Marlborough, Mass.; MesoScale Discovery of Gaithersburg, Md.; and Nanogen Inc. of San Diego.

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