

Health experts, scientists to discuss bird flu studies

February 10 2012

The World Health Organization said Friday it will meet next week to determine whether scientists can publish research on a bird flu virus that may be easily passed among humans.

The two-day discussion will relate to research on a mutation of the [H5N1 virus](#) that [international scientists](#) halted on January 20 citing fears of the devastation it could wreak were it to escape the laboratory.

According to WHO, avian influenza H5N1 is primarily transmitted between birds, and very rarely to humans.

Two separate teams of researchers, one in the Netherlands and the other in the United States, found ways late last year to engineer the H5N1 virus so that it is transmitted among mammals, something that has been rare.

The breakthrough raised alarm that the method could fall into the wrong hands and unleash a massive [flu pandemic](#) that could cost millions of lives.

A US advisory panel in December urged that key details remain unpublished.

WHO said it will hold a technical meeting on Wednesday and Thursday on the specific circumstances and results of the two studies.

"There will be 22 participants: two teams of researchers, representatives of the influenza laboratory network and representatives of the scientific newspapers Science and Nature" said WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib.

They will try to reach a consensus about practical actions to resolve the most urgent issues, particularly those related to access to and dissemination of the results of this research, WHO said.

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Citation: Health experts, scientists to discuss bird flu studies (2012, February 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

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