

Dutch okays mutant bird flu study's publication

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The Dutch government on Friday gave a top scientist the green light to publish a research paper in the United States on a mutant killer flu virus, following approval by a US panel of experts.

"Deputy Minister Henk Bleker approved a permit for the publication of the research done by professor Ron Fouchier on the [H5N1 bird flu](#) virus," his spokeswoman Cindy Heijdra told AFP.

Dutch approval comes after a panel of US science and security experts last month said two papers on the deadly flu should be published in the US-based Science journal, reversing an earlier decision to withhold key details.

Fouchier had to get permission first from the Dutch Department of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation -- in line with EU regulations -- because a risk existed that the [H5N1 virus](#), as well as its research, "could be used for the wrong purposes", the Dutch department said in a statement.

"The minister gave the go-ahead after considering the risks and advantages of publishing the paper including the freedom of science and publication, national health and security," his spokeswoman Heijdra added.

Fouchier's team at Rotterdam's Erasmus Medical Centre last year announced the mutant version which showed how an engineered H5N1

flu virus could pass easily in the air between ferrets. A second team based in Wisconsin came to the same conclusion.

But US experts previously opposed publishing the research over fears it could fall into the wrong hands and unleash a deadly flu epidemic.

Bird flu is believed to kill more than half the people it infects, making it much more lethal than typical strains of the seasonal virus.

According to the [World Health Organisation](#), there have been at least 573 cases of H5N1 [bird flu](#) in humans in 15 countries since 2003, with 58.6 percent of those resulting in death.

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