

Japan government gets new anti-flu powers

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Japan's government on Friday gave itself new powers aimed at curbing the outbreak of infectious diseases, as the country nervously watches the spread of deadly H7N9 bird flu in China.

Under a new law, if the virus mutates and becomes transmissible between humans, the government would set up an emergency headquarters, strengthen quarantine activities at airports, and vaccinate doctors and government officials.

Local officials will also have the power to order the cancellation of events at which large numbers of people are expected to gather and to shutter schools.

If the government foresees a rapid increase in the rate of infection, the prime minister will also be empowered to declare a state of emergency, with the option to vaccinate the entire population.

[Health Minister](#) Norihisa Tamura told reporters: "We have drafted a law that would have the government take effective measures in places where lots of people gather."

The plans come as the death toll from H7N9 [bird flu](#) in China reached 10 out of 38 human cases with another victim in Shanghai on Thursday.

Beijing announced on March 31 that it had found the strain in people for the first time.

The virus is believed to spread to humans from birds, triggering the mass [culling](#) of poultry in several Chinese cities.

Experts fear the prospect of such viruses mutating into a form easily transmissible between humans has the potential to trigger a pandemic.

The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) said earlier this week that there was as yet no evidence of human-to-[human transmission](#).

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on Thursday said H7N9 bird flu posed an "exceptional situation", explaining that the virus, while dangerous to humans, was hard to detect in the avian host.

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