

Good hygiene might prevent bird flu spread

October 19 2005

A Purdue University scientist says there's a lot people can do to help prevent a bird flu pandemic, with the most obvious being good hygiene.

The World Health Organization has confirmed at least 60 deaths due to bird flu. But if the virus is transmitted human to human, it's been estimated millions of people could be killed.

James McGlothlin, an associate professor in the Purdue School of Health Sciences, says basic, common-sense hygiene practices -- frequent hand washing and covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing -- are obvious ways in which the spread of all viruses can be prevented.

McGlothlin says avian flu bears a striking resemblance to the 1918 flu that killed approximately 50 million people worldwide. But, he said, the big difference today is we know the virus could be coming, so we can take steps to prevent a pandemic.

He said the worst case scenario is one in which a person who has the human flu virus is exposed to another person who has the avian flu and the two viruses mix and then mutate, forming a new virus that spreads from human to human and for which humans have no immunity.

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Citation: Good hygiene might prevent bird flu spread (2005, October 19) retrieved 1 May 2024

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