

Scientists ready to crack bird flu code

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British scientists say they will determine the genetic sequence of the bird flu virus in Turkey within the next few days.

Researchers at the National Institute of Medical Research can use the code to determine whether the virus is resistant to Tamiflu, the drug being stockpiled to deal with a potential pandemic, the London Telegraph reported.

A team at the World Influenza Center in London has received six samples of the virus from Turkey. Of those, two have been confirmed to be H5NI, said Colin Blakemore, chief executive of the Medical Research Council.

The team has also succeeded in growing the first sample virus in eggs and will determine the entire genetic code.

"They will have the complete sequence in two or three days and that will be very important," said Blakemore. A decade ago, it would have been impossible to produce the sequence so quickly.

"It is incredible. This will tell us where the virus came from. It will tell us whether there have been mutations," he said.

Blakemore said the gene sequence will also shed light on whether it could mutate to cause a pandemic.

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