

Experts question generic bird flu vaccine

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A bird flu vaccine ordered by the British government in an effort to prevent a pandemic may be ineffective, The Times of London reported Tuesday.

British officials sought bids from pharmaceutical companies for a contract to manufacture as many as 3 million doses of a generic H5N1 vaccine. The winning bid is expected to be announced soon.

But writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a team of scientists that studied the avian flu in China and Southeast Asia suggests generic vaccines may prove ineffective against a virus that has already had years to genetically diversify.

The team is led by Yi Guan of China's Shantou University and includes one of the world's foremost experts on avian flu genetics, Robert Webster of St Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, The Times said.

Writing in the journal, the team said, "The antigenic diversity of viruses currently circulating in Southeast Asia and southern China challenges the wisdom of reliance on a single human vaccine for pandemic preparedness."

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