

United States and France join in flu fight

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and France's Institute Pasteur agreed Monday to help create world detection programs for flu viruses.

The joint operation, to begin in Southeast Asia, will focus on viruses that might have the potential to trigger a human pandemic.

The agreement establishes a working group to supervise such collaborative projects as creating epidemiological testing, diagnosis and control programs in nations affected by or at-risk for the spread of the H5N1 avian influenza strain. The two nations will also exchanging technical expertise to foster rapid response to such disease threats,

"The looming threat of a global influenza pandemic demands global, regional and national attention, and preparation and response to a pandemic is a shared responsibility," said HHS Deputy Secretary Alex Azar said.

"The avian flu and respiratory diseases have been our constant concern, especially in the Pasteur Institutes in the Asian region," Institute Pasteur President Professor Alice Dautry said. "We ... heartily welcome this new partnership with HHS to fight the potential pandemic. This is a unique opportunity to join efforts to fight infectious diseases upfront."

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