

Bird flu not a public threat?

March 3 2006



As the bird flu spreads through Europe, the British government's chief scientist said the chance of British person getting bird flu is 1 in 100 million.

David King told the Times of London that while the spread of the H5N1 virus throughout parts of Europe is a serious issue for farming and wildlife, it does not pose a public health threat.

In Asian countries where bird flu has spread, King suggests that individuals there were about seven times more likely to win the national lottery than get the avian flu, which can be fatal.

King told the Times that in China 14 infections and eight deaths have been confirmed by the World Health Organization in a population of 1.3 billion people -- a rate King estimates is one case per 93 million and one death per 163 million.

"That's a back-of-the-envelope calculation based on China, but the real figure will not be much different," King said. "It may in fact be even lower than 1 in 100 million, because we don't live cheek-by-jowl with chickens in the same way -- simply put, this is not an issue we should worry about in terms of public health."

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