

# Old drug may become new bird flu weapon

March 15 2006

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Amantadine, a generic drug created in the 1970s to treat seasonal flu might become a new weapon to use along with Tamiflu if a bird flu pandemic occurs.

Initial tests among the first avian flu victims in Southeast Asia suggested the virus was resistant to amantadine, The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday. But evidence is mounting that amantadine might be effective against some of the 130 strains of the H5N1 virus that have been sequenced.

World Health Organization officials in Geneva told The Journal the H5N1 strains found in Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia seem to be mostly resistant, but strains from China, Indonesia and Turkey seem to be somewhat sensitive to the drug.

Plans currently involve using Tamiflu should the virus evolve and cause a pandemic. However, WHO experts note amantadine and its older cousin, rimantadine, are produced by many generic drug makers, offering a potentially huge supply at costs far lower than Tamiflu's.

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Citation: Old drug may become new bird flu weapon (2006, March 15) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-03-drug-bird-flu-weapon.html>

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