

Scientists ponder bird flu findings

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Avian flu fears have scientists trying to determine how bird flu spreads, and one Italian researcher says that information should be given to the public.

The dilemma is apparently as widespread as are fears of a pandemic. The World Health Organization urges nations to share bird-flu data but limits access to its database concerning avian flu. That database reportedly contains 2,300 genetic sequences of the virus -- approximately one-third of the world's known sequences, The Wall Street Journal reported Monday.

But Italian scientist Ilaria Capua, director of the Italian Veterinary Institute, has ignored the WHO.

Capua, last month, received a sample from Nigerian officials of the virus that caused the first confirmed case of bird flu in Africa. Instead of entering the information into the secret WHO's database, as WHO officials urged her to do, Capua posted the data on the Internet.

Capua's action has spurred a controversy in the scientific community, but she says one person who supports her action is Nancy Cox, chief of the influenza branch of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Capua says she received a personal note from Cox that said, "I applaud your decision."

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