

Tomato vaccines: New bird flu weapon?

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Australian scientist Amanda Walmsley says she is trying to grow a bird flu vaccine in tomatoes to be used to prevent the disease in chickens.

After being part of a Monash University team that developed a plant-made vaccine for Newcastle disease -- a virus that affects poultry -- Walmsley has turned her attention to growing a bird flu vaccine in tomatoes, the Melbourne Herald Sun reported Wednesday.

She said developing vaccines in tomatoes would allow vaccines to be fed to birds rather than injected.

"We just harvest the fruit, freeze-dry it and there's your vaccine," Walmsley told the newspaper. "That would be a lot easier than giving injections -- especially for a flock of 5,000 chickens."

She explained researchers remove a gene from a protective protein in the bird flu virus and then put it in the tomato plant where it would reproduce the protein.

"The plant is a factory for the vaccine," she said. "The plant actually produces it in its cells."

Such a vaccine would eliminate contamination and allergy problems found in vaccines grown in eggs or yeast.

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