

US journal editor backs change to bird flu policy

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The editor of the US journal Science said Friday he supports the decision of bird flu experts in Geneva [to make public controversial research about a mutant form of the H5N1 virus.](#)

"The supreme court of decision-making on these things should not be me," said Bruce Alberts, editor-in-chief of Science, which along with the British journal Nature had been on track to publish partial versions of the research in March.

Alberts said the two journals were working closely with each other and with authorities, and would await further information before making plans to publish the manuscripts in full in the months ahead.

US biosecurity chiefs urged in November that key details of the papers remain unpublished, citing fears of a [pandemic](#) should a mutated [H5N1 virus](#) escape the laboratory.

However, Alberts said they ran into a host of problems when it came to disseminating the research in restricted channels across international borders, and the effort had to be abandoned.

"Many people in the government worked very hard to try to see whether they could develop a mechanism that could be used to selectively get redacted information to the right people, and they came across all kinds of difficulties."

The engineered virus, created by two separate research teams in the Netherlands and Wisconsin, was able to spread through the air among mammals, indicating it could potentially be deadly to humans on a massive scale.

Alberts said he hoped that the decision taken after a two-day meeting at the [World Health Organization](#) would lead to the creation of an international body of scientists and biosecurity experts for making future decisions on such matters.

"The very best possible outcome for this is the establishment of an international version of the NSABB," he said, referring to the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity, a US [advisory panel](#) that urged the government, which had funded the research, to withhold key details from publication.

However, NSABB leaders said last year that an international decision was needed and that they would obey any decision agreed by the global science community.

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