

# Dangerous Flu Epidemic Could Occur

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**Scientists warn that world leaders are ignoring the threat of an influenza pandemic that could infect a billion people and, because of modern air travel, travel around the world in hours.**

**Why is this flu in birds?** The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) calls it *Avian Influenza*; but its common name is *Bird Flu*.

Bird flu is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds (including chickens, ducks, and turkeys) very ill and kill them.

All birds are thought to be susceptible to the avian influenza, though some species, such as wild ducks, are more resistant than others. Domestic poultry, such as chickens or turkeys, are particularly susceptible.

Infection triggers a wide spectrum of symptoms in birds, ranging from mild illness to a highly contagious and rapidly fatal disease resulting in severe epidemics.

In severe cases, the flu is characterized by a sudden onset of severe illness and rapid death, with a mortality that can approach 100 percent.

**What are the symptoms in humans?** In humans, symptoms of bird flu have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress), and other severe and life-threatening complications. The symptoms of bird flu may depend on which virus caused the infection.

It is believed that most cases of bird flu infection in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces.

As of May 19, 2005, there have been 97 human cases of avian influenza A (H5N1) in Vietnam (76), Thailand (17), and Cambodia (4) resulting in 53 deaths.

**This could be an extremely lethal epidemic**

**among humans.** International experts have written in detail about how this infection could travel around the world and kill millions, if the threat from the virulent H5N1 strain of Asian bird flu is not taken seriously.

The disease, first identified in Italy more than 100 years ago, occurs worldwide.

This latest bird flu first surfaced in poultry in Hong Kong and China eight years ago. It has killed 37 people in Vietnam, 12 in Thailand, and 4 in Cambodia. A new outbreak has been reported in China.

Global health officials fear it may mutate into a lethal strain that could rival the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic that killed between 20 million and 40 million people.

Such a pandemic could affect 20 percent of the world's population. Experts fear this would put 30 million in hospitals and kill a quarter of them. It would also lead to the collapse of international trade, causing economic and social chaos.

Although avian flu is very infectious in birds, it does not spread easily among humans. But there is a danger that it may mix with a human virus and form a new disease.

**One scientific warning.** In commentaries published in May 2005 in the science journal, *Nature*, some of the world's top flu authorities said that only a meticulously planned global response stood a chance of averting catastrophe.

They called for a permanent international task force to prepare for a pandemic, in place of country-by-country arrangements.

They said urgent action was required to develop ways of designing and manufacturing vaccines against the virus—a process that now takes six months—and to agree on international guidelines for eradicating potentially dangerous strains in poultry and wildlife.

Experts estimate a fifth of the world's population could be affected, with 30 million needing hospital treatment and around 7.5 million dying.

Writing in *Nature*, they warn the world's economy could also be damaged by effects on in-

ternational trade, as well as death and illness.

The U.S. and Dutch experts call for a unified approach to the problem.

They say only a global effort, rather than separate work by individual countries, will mean any pandemic can be contained.

**More about this crisis.** The last major flu epidemic was in 1968, killing a million people.

The worst was the Spanish flu in 1918, which killed millions worldwide.

Michael Osterholm, of the University of Minnesota in the United States, said bold leadership and financial investment in vaccine research was required from industrialized countries, which were not taking the issue seriously enough.

“These nations urgently need to recognize the economic, security and health threat that the next flu pandemic poses and invest accordingly,” he said.

“The arrival of pandemic flu will trigger a reaction that will change the world overnight.”

Albert Osterhaus, of the Erasmus Medical Centre in Rotterdam, wants a task force of experts in human and animal medicine, virology, epidemiology, pathology, ecology, and agriculture.

Teams would be sent to investigate outbreaks, to assess pandemic potential, and organize containment.

About 50 countries have drawn up plans to deal with a pandemic; but only a few are in Asia, where it is likely to start.

Chinese news agencies reported yesterday that scientists had developed vaccines that blocked the spread of the deadly H5N1 strain among birds and mammals.

**Have humans contracted this latest bird flu?** Avian influenza does not normally infect species other than birds and pigs. But humans came down with the bird flu in Hong Kong during 1997, when the H5N1 strain infected 18 humans; 6 of whom died.

Then, people became infected after coming into close contact with live infected poultry.

Genetic studies showed the virus jumped directly from birds to humans; and it caused severe illness with high mortality.

Hong Kong’s entire poultry population, estimated at around 1.5 million birds, was destroyed within three days. This is thought to have averted a pandemic.

The World Health Organization has said the H5N1 bird flu virus is responsible for a number

of deaths in Vietnam. They suspect people became ill after coming into contact with chicken feces.

**Why is H5N1 of particular concern?** Of the 15 avian influenza virus subtypes, H5N1 is of particular concern for the following reasons:

It mutates rapidly and seems to acquire genes from viruses infecting other animal species. It can cause severe disease in humans.

Birds that survive infection excrete virus for at least 10 days, orally and in feces, helping spread the virus at live poultry markets and by migratory birds. The more birds that come down with bird flu, the greater the opportunity for direct infection of humans.

The more humans get infected, the greater the likelihood people can become infected with both human and bird flu strains. Humans could then serve as a “mixing vessel” for a new type of virus that could easily be transmitted from person to person. Such an event would mark the start of an influenza pandemic.

**More information on symptoms and possible vaccines.** When humans came down with H5N1 bird flu in Hong Kong in 1997, patients developed symptoms of fever, sore throat, cough, and (in several of the fatal cases) severe respiratory distress secondary to viral pneumonia. Previously healthy adults and children, and some with chronic medical conditions, were affected.

Fortunately, tests for diagnosing all influenza strains of animals and humans are rapid and reliable.

At least four months would be needed to produce a new vaccine, in significant quantities, capable of conferring protection against a new virus subtype.

**Caution is needed.** A case in Thailand indicated the probable transmission of the virus from a girl who had the disease to her mother, who also died.

The fear is that if the H5N1 virus did mutate and spread amongst humans, it would do so rapidly and affect millions.

Experts repeatedly warn such a pandemic would be far worse than the one which occurred in 1918 (called the “Spanish flu”), which killed between 20 and 40 million people. (My father’s brother died in that immense epidemic.)

Scientists are working to develop a vaccine against bird flu, but are hampered by not knowing what form it would take, should it spread amongst humans.

# Watch Judicial Nominee Placements

**The current Senate battle may appear to be of little consequence; but, in reality, it is highly significant. The question is whether a simple majority of senators can be permitted to approve federal appeals court nominees. That surely does not seem to be a subject for your concern and mine. But consider these facts which I have gleaned:**

- Last night, May 24, a centrist group of 14 senators made a deal which appeared to avoid an immediate Senate filibuster crisis; **but it will return when the president sends Supreme Court nominees to the Senate.**

- Three previously blocked nominees to the federal appeals court (Priscilla Owen, William Pryor, and Janice Rogers Brown) will now be given opportunity to be voted on. **All three are strong conservative jurists.**

- The Senate has yet to establish whether the minority party can be prevented from filibustering judges who have made it through committee to the floor of the Senate. **And that means the question of filibusters on any future Supreme Court nominees remains open.**

***What is the great significance of all this? Here are some news notes of which you may be unaware:***

- Nominees for the U.S. Supreme Court are selected by the president **from judges serving on the federal appeals court.**

- If the above three nominees are voted to the appeals court, **the president will now have three solid conservatives to nominate for upcoming Supreme Court vacancies.**

- It is known that **Chief Justice William Rehnquist will probably retire within a couple months. But he is already fairly conservative** (although perhaps not as much as Owens, Pryor, and Brown). So a conservative to fill that post will not be critical. However, keep in mind that the position of chief justice is quite influential.

- **Bush's potential choices to succeed Rehnquist** as chief justice include two sitting justices: **Antonin Scalia** and **Clarence Thomas**. Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas are the three conservatives on the Supreme Court. (As I recall, all three are Catholic.)

- **It is expected that at least two more Supreme Court vacancies will occur before President Bush leaves office.**

- Scalia and Thomas dissented with Rehnquist from decisions protecting abortion rights, allowing

affirmative action, and limiting prayer in public schools.

- **Thomas**, 57, almost certainly would draw Democratic opposition and possibly a bid to block a vote on his nomination. In 1991 he was confirmed for a slot as an associate justice by a 52-48 vote, following an allegation that he sexually harassed a subordinate at a federal agency. He strongly denied the claim.

- **Scalia**, 69, might have an easier road to confirmation. He was approved 98-0 by the Senate in 1986.

- **The crucial factor is whether conservatives will replace any of the other Supreme Court justices. All, but one of them, always vote liberal** (Anthony Kennedy, David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Stephen Breyer). **That one swing vote is Sandra Day O'Connor**, who sometimes votes one way and sometimes the other. (Kennedy formerly was an occasional moderate; now his is fully liberal.)

- Democrats might be more willing to allow a staunch conservative replacement for Rehnquist than for **the two older justices, most likely to retire: Sandra Day O'Connor, 75, or John Paul Stevens, 85.** Both O'Connor and Stevens have supported abortion rights, affirmative action, and gay rights.

- **If any of those non-conservative jurists leaves the Court, to be replaced by conservatives, it would radically affect future Court decisions.** The potential balance of the entire Court would shift.

- Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy is the special target of the conservatives at this time. On April 9, conservative leaders met in Washington to discuss "*Remedies to Judicial Tyranny*." They decided that, because of his extreme decisions, Kennedy (a Ronald Reagan appointee) should be impeached! (It is a little-known fact that the most important thing that a U.S. president ever does is to appoint Supreme Court justices!)

- The group of 14 senators, who made the "deal," made no commitment to vote for or against a filibuster on two other conservative nominees, William Myers and Henry Saad. According to Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, both will be "filibustered"; so they cannot be appointed to the appeals court. Forty-four Democrats and one independent in the current Senate have each declared that they are willing to filibuster, to stop conservative nominations to federal or Supreme Court judgeships. (A filibuster enables a single senator to stop legislation that a senate majority would otherwise enact!)

- **Why is all this so important? —Because when**

**the U.S. Congress, with presidential approval, enacts a strict National Sunday Law,—it may immediately go to the Supreme Court for consideration. If a majority of conservatives are on that Court, the law will be upheld as the law of the land.**

• **Ironically, it will also be conservative placements on the Supreme Court which will protect the morals of our citizens!** Liberals on the Court are trying to paganize the nation; but conservatives will try to Christianize it.

• **No longer does the House or Senate legislate on moral issues.** They are afraid to because their constituents (those who vote them into office) are divided on such subjects. But they also avoid such topics because influential lobbying groups pay them to either avoid moral issues or vote against them.

• **What are some of these moral-type issues?**

✓ Should homosexuals be permitted to get married?

✓ Should polygamy be legalized?

✓ Should homosexual “children’s books” be permitted in libraries?

✓ Should perverted reading matter and pornography be permitted on the internet?

✓ Should homosexuals be allowed to adopt and raise children?

✓ Should physician-assisted suicide be permitted?

✓ In order to avoid taking care of them, should the handicapped and old people be killed?

✓ Should Indians be permitted to start gambling casinos all across America?

✓ Should all gambling in America be stopped?

✓ Should hard drugs be legalized?

(There are other issues which Congress also fears to solve, such as illegal immigration, outsourcing jobs

to overseas, imposing protective tariffs, calling our troops home, stopping pork barreling, and making lobbying illegal. But, to appease various political interests, they generally avoid such topics.)

• **Only five people in America decide the moral issues of the nation.** A Supreme Court majority (currently consisting of liberals) decides what is right and what is wrong for the entire nation.

• **Who are the current U.S. Supreme Court Justices, and what are their ages and present status?**

Chief Justice William H. **Rehnquist** (born 1924, appointed by Richard Nixon in 1971, and elevated by Ronald Reagan in 1986), 81 years old. He has thyroid cancer and is expected to retire in July. Conservative.

Justice **John Paul Stevens** (born 1920, appointed by Gerald Ford in 1975), 85 years old. He is expected to retire before President Bush leaves office. Liberal.

Justice **Sandra Day O'Connor** (born 1930, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1981) is 75 years old. She is expected to retire before President Bush leaves office. Swing voter, but most often liberal.

Justice **Antonin Scalia** (born 1936, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1986), 69 years old. Conservative. It is likely that President Bush will nominate him to the post of chief justice when Rehnquist retires.

Justice **Anthony Kennedy** (born 1936, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1988), 69 years old. Liberal (formerly occasionally a swing voter).

Justice **David Souter** (born 1939, appointed by George H.W. Bush in 1990), 66 years old. Liberal.

Justice **Clarence Thomas** (born 1948, appointed by George H.W. Bush in 1991), 57 years old. Conservative.

Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** (born 1933, appointed by Bill Clinton in 1993, 72 years old. Liberal.

Justice **Stephen Breyer** (born 1938, appointed by Bill Clinton in 1994), 67 years old. Liberal.

• Conservatives used to concentrate their efforts on getting Congress to enact moral laws, but without success. **Now conservatives are focusing on the real solution: getting jurists who believe in morality placed on federal courts.** The Democrats and, apart from labor unions, their primary financial backers (abortion, homosexual, and pornography interests) deeply fear the outcome and are desperately trying to block it. **We, on the other hand, recognize that a National Sunday Law could be the outcome.** -vf

Who are the group of 14 who temporarily stopped the conservative drive requiring that all federal and Supreme Court judges be voted on by the Senate? *Here they are:*

**Democrats:** Robert Byrd (West Virginia) / Daniel Inouye (Hawaii) / Mary Landrieu (Louisiana) / Joseph Lieberman (Connecticut) / Ben Nelson (Nebraska) / Mark Pryor (Arkansas) / Ken Salazar (Colorado) / **Republicans:** Lincoln Chafee (Rhode Island) / Susan Collins (Maine) / Mike DeWine (Ohio) / Lindsey Graham (South Carolina) / John McCain (Arizona) / John Warner (Virginia) / Olympia Snowe (Maine)