

Chicken Little alert - an orchestrated fear game with HUGE profits attached

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BL Fisher Note:

Hyping the exaggerated dangers of a pandemic bird flu potentially wiping out the human race is **a profitable business for public health officials and drug companies** eager to keep the public in a perpetual state of fear. Fear leads people to do things they ordinarily would not do if they were not running for cover.

Fear persuades politicians to vote for **huge sums of taxpayer dollars to give to drug companies and government health agencies** so they can collaborate with each other **to create experimental pandemic flu vaccines**. Fear persuades the people to allow themselves to be governed by new state and federal laws enacted since September 11, 2001 that will **enable public health officials and politicians to use military force to arrest, quarantine and vaccinate citizens against their will with experimental vaccines that can kill or cripple them**.

And when somebody dies or is crippled by the experimental vaccines they are forced to take after the Secretary of Health and Human Services declares an "emergency," **nobody can be held accountable in a court of law**: the **drug companies** making the vaccines, **doctors** injecting the vaccines, and the **militia** rounding people up at gunpoint and taking them to places where they will be either quarantined or forced to get the vaccines **are protected from liability by these new laws**.

Manufacturing fear of microorganisms is a profitable but dangerous business in America. The civil liberties the M.D./Ph.D. fear mongers have persuaded politicians to take away in the name of disease control **will make America no better than the totalitarian governments in the world ruling their people with fear and oppression**.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12358223/wid/11915773/>

MSNBC

Chicken Little alert? Hysteria could sap money from worse health threats

By Rebecca Cook Dube

Special to MSNBC.com

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Doomsday predictions about bird flu seem to be spreading faster than the virus itself. But a small group of skeptics say the bird flu hype is overblown and ultimately harmful to the public's health.

There's no guarantee bird flu will become a pandemic, and if it does there's no guarantee it will kill millions of people. The real trouble, these skeptics say, is that bird flu hysteria is sapping money and attention away from more important health threats.

"I have a bunch of patients coming in here who are more worried about bird flu than they are about heart disease," said Dr. Marc Siegel, an internist and associate professor of medicine at the New York University School of Medicine. "The fear is out of proportion to the current risk."

Even Dr. Anthony Fauci, the National Institutes of Health's infectious disease chief, recently cautioned against overreacting if the virus surfaces in North American birds, as it is expected to do later this year.

"One migratory bird does not a pandemic make," Fauci told The Associated Press.

Scary scenarios

It's hard to blame people for feeling skittish. The chief avian flu coordinator for the United Nations, Dave Nabarro, said last fall he was "almost certain" a bird flu pandemic would strike soon, and predicted up to 150 million deaths. The U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mike Leavitt, advised Americans to stockpile cans of tuna fish and powdered milk under their beds in case of an outbreak. Renowned flu expert Robert Webster has said society needs to face the possibility that half of the population could die in a bird flu pandemic.

"Ridiculous," scoffed Wendy Orent, an anthropologist and author of *"Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease."* She said public health officials have vastly exaggerated the potential danger of bird flu. Several factors make it unlikely that bird flu will become a dangerous pandemic, Orent said: the virus, H5N1, is still several mutations away from being able to spread easily between people; and the virus generally attaches to the deepest part of the lungs, making it harder to transmit by coughing or breathing.

"We don't have anything that makes us think this bug will go pandemic," Orent said. "Yes, it's virtually certain in human history there will be another pandemic strain . but there's no reason for it to happen now, or 10 years from now or 20 years from now." Public health officials counter that it's better to be safe than sorry; better to prepare for a pandemic that never comes than to be caught unprepared. Avian flu has killed 110 people worldwide since 2003, according to the World Health Organization.

"Even if H5N1 does not evolve into a pandemic, the steps we are taking right now will benefit us down the road," said Tom Skinner, a spokesman for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "We simply want people to be informed and educated about bird flu. The best antidote for fear is information."

But public health funding is a zero-sum game, both Orent and Siegel note. Money that's being poured into short-term bird flu preparations isn't available for long-term fixes that would, for example, increase hospitals' ability to handle a surge of patients in a national emergency.

"People have been riding this for all they can get," said Orent. "We don't need to make this into something it's not in order to get what we need, which is a better public health system."

All the eggs in one basket?

And while everyone is nervously watching bird flu progress through Asia and Europe, some experts worry another bug could sneak up and bite us.

"Preparation is fine, but short-term hysteria interferes with long-term planning," Siegel said. He said he'd like to see more efforts at general pandemic preparation - such as developing better methods for making vaccines - rather than a laser-like focus on H5N1. "We're putting all our eggs in one basket."

Flu virologist Adolfo Garcia-Sastre, a microbiology professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, agrees that all the focus on H5N1 may be unhealthy. As part of the team of scientists who **recreated the deadly 1918 flu strain**, he's glad people are paying more attention to flu but thinks the level of worry is a bit too high. If this avian flu doesn't turn into a pandemic, he wonders, will all these new flu-fighting measures be tossed aside?

"Focusing only on H5N1 ... I think is a little bit shortsighted," Garcia-Sastre said. Public health officials always have to walk a fine line when sounding the alarm, said risk communications expert Peter Sandman, of Princeton, N.J., a consultant to the World Health Organization and the U.S. Department of Defense. Bird flu is a tough case because it's both scary and unlikely. People see-saw between overreacting because the potential threat is horrific, and under-reacting because the threat is also unlikely.

"When you look at a risk that's horrific but not likely, it's hard to know how to think about it," Sandman said.

Sandman said public health officials need to do a better job of communicating the uncertainty around bird flu - as Fauci seemed to be attempting this week.

"It's unfair and dishonest to make it sound like we're sure H5N1 is coming soon and it's going to kill half the population," Sandman said. "It's equally irresponsible to say,

because only a hundred people have died, it's not a biggie. It's potentially very scary, but potentially is only potentially."

Mixed messages

Vocabulary is part of the problem, Sandman said. The term "bird flu" is used for the virus that is now killing birds - and has infected nearly 200 people who came into very close contact with birds. And it's also being used to describe a mutated virus - **which hasn't yet emerged** - that would spread easily among humans.

Sandman stressed that the current "bird flu" that kills birds is not the same as the potential "bird flu" that could cause a deadly pandemic.

"Chicken isn't a problem," he explained. "The big problem is the risk of mutation, at which point I'm at risk from the subway seat you sat on, or the doorknob you pulled open. After the mutation happens we should both be more afraid of doorknobs than chicken. Before the mutation, we shouldn't be afraid of doorknobs or chickens."

Even if avian flu transforms into a human pandemic, it may be mild. The most recent flu pandemic, in 1968, went unnoticed by everyone except scientists because it wasn't much worse than a normal flu season in terms of illnesses and deaths.

Government officials continue urging people to prepare by stockpiling a few weeks' worth of food, water and medical supplies. But skeptics like Siegel and Orent say you're better off guarding against more realistic dangers - heart attacks, for example, or even gum disease.

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