

# Influenza: How do we deal with emerging threats?

By ACSH Staff — May 10, 2013

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Although for all intents and purposes the flu season is over, at least in North America, experts have recently been ringing alarm bells about the possibility of a new influenza pandemic.

A new [report](#) [2] in the journal *Scientific Reports* reveals that researchers from MIT found 581 flu virus strains circulating in pigs and birds with mutations that could potentially allow them to adapt to enter the human population. These strains have similarities to the 1968 Hong Kong flu virus that caused a pandemic. Study leader Dr. Ram Sasisekharn remarked One of the amazing things about the influenza virus is its ability to grab genes from different pools. There could be viral genes that mix among pigs, or between birds and pigs. Such mixing of genes could give the viruses the ability to attack humans.

Taking another tack, an [op-ed](#) [3] in the *NY Times* by David Quammen points out that the next flu virus with pandemic potential may already be with us at least among those in Saudi Arabia. A virus that has affected 33 people in Saudi Arabia and thus far killed 18 has a case fatality rate of 55 percent that is, it is very lethal. The author notes that in many cases the reservoir for such viruses is some type of wildlife. It could be a rodent, goose or bat, for example. The SARS virus that emerged in China probably was derived from bats animals that live in large communal groups and can fly very good potential for spreading a virus.

ACSH advisor and director of the center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Michael Osterholm, [concurs](#) [4] with the serious implications of new viruses and combinations thereof. He warns The world as a whole must invest in a new generation of effective influenza and coronavirus vaccines. They are the ultimate insurance policy against similar future emerging viruses. These viruses may seem far away, but tomorrow they could be at America s doorstep.

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## Links

[1] <http://hsdispatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/flu.jpg>

[2] <http://www.nature.com/srep/2013/130510/srep01822/full/srep01822.html>

[3] <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/opinion/index.html>

[4] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/opinion/the-next-contagion-closer-than-you-think.html?pagewanted=all>