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H7N9 FLU RISKS AND RESPONSES IN ASIA DISCUSSED BY WELLCOME TRUST'S NEW DIRECTOR JEREMY FARRAR

SEATTLE, WA (May 2, 2013) - As of late April, China's state-run Xinhua news agency had reported 126 human cases of H7N9, a novel strain of bird flu that has been the cause of 24 deaths nationwide. Most forms of avian influenza do not infect humans, with notable exceptions like this H7N9 strain and the H5N1 strain, which caused approximately 300 deaths in Asia following a 2003 outbreak. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in late April that it had not yet seen "evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission" although such a development remains a concern because of the potential for influenza viruses to mutate.

In light of the unfolding events, NBR spoke with [Jeremy Farrar](#) (Oxford University) about the context of, and responses to, the current H7N9 outbreak. Dr. Farrar is Professor of Tropical Medicine and Global Health at Oxford University, Global Scholar at Princeton University, and Director of the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit in Vietnam. He will become Director of the Wellcome Trust in October of this year. Noting that "much more surveillance of illness than ever before and much better coordination of the human and animal sector" means "were going to have to get used to finding things that ten years ago we probably would never have known about," Dr. Farrar emphasized the likelihood "that were going to see this sort of thing being reported on a much more regular basis." He commended the virology community in China for sharing the sequences of new viruses and "[integrating] epidemiology with the response in the clinical sector ... and on the animal side, along with political support from the affected cities and at a national level," calling the response "a case study in how to integrate human health and animal health with the needed political support."

In the interview, Dr. Farrar discusses:

- what researchers do and do not know about the threat posed by H7N9 and how it compares to previous avian flu outbreaks,
- whether Asia will always be ground zero for flu outbreaks,
- the importance of clinical and biological research,
- improved coordination at regional and global levels since the 2003 SARS outbreak, and what we still need to work on, and
- what it would mean to mass-produce an H7N9 vaccine.

To access the interview:

To read the full interview with Dr. Farrar on "H7N9 Flu in the Asia-Pacific: Risks, Responses, and the Consequences of Better Surveillance," visit the NBR website [here](#). Access NBR's research on global health issues [here](#).

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