

Bush Plan Offered to Fight a Flu Epidemic: CIMIT's Michael Callahan, MD, Weighs In

Summary of Boston Globe article appearing November 2, 2005:

President Bush proposed a \$7.1 billion plan to develop the nation's resources for fighting a potential epidemic sparked by avian flu, first identified in Hong Kong in 1997. The plan would buy vaccines for 20 million people, expand stockpiles of flu pills, and engineer a different method for making flu shots by 2010. The plan, which needs congressional approval, came just days after the Senate approved \$8 billion for flu epidemic preparations, and appears to cover similar ground.

However, many scientists and public health officials think that this plan may not adequately address the perils of a pandemic, as the flu pills like Tamiflu and Relenza do not protect against contracting the flu.

Among the experts quoted was CIMIT's Director of Biodefense and Mass Casualty Care, Dr. Michael Callahan, who pointed out that flu pills are usually intended "to be used literally after the flu bomb has gone off to shorten the period of infection." Scientists have not yet ascertained how well the pills would work against avian flu.