



**Disaster-Preparedness Expert:
We Are ‘Way Behind’ In Efforts To Combat Avian Flu and
We Must Do ‘Whatever It Takes to Get Ourselves Up to Speed,’
Dr. Irwin Redlener Says at TIME Global Health Summit**

**U.S. Efforts So Far Are
‘Biological Equivalent of Not Fixing the Levees’
in New Orleans, Redlener Says**

NEW YORK – Dr. Irwin Redlener, director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness said today at the TIME Global Health Summit that the country’s waiting so long to address the threat of an avian flu pandemic is the “biological equivalent of not fixing the levees” in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina struck.

“We waited too long to get ourselves in gear...we were asleep at the wheel,” said Dr. Redlener, who is also the Associate Dean of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

The three-day summit, sponsored by TIME magazine and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has gathered together national and international leaders in medicine, government, business, public policy and the arts to develop actions and solutions to world health crises.

Dr. Redlener said the threat of pandemic avian flu is a “national emergency,” that we are “way behind,” and must do “whatever it takes to get ourselves up to speed.”

His fellow panelists, Dr. David L. Heymann, Executive Director, Communicable Diseases, of the World Health Organization, and Dr. William Karesh, Field Veterinary Program Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society, concurred with Dr. Redlener’s call for increased planning, funding and research.

Dr. Redlener noted that the U.S. has only 2 million doses of Tamiflu available. Its effectiveness against protecting humans against a bird flu virus is unknown, but he said if taken early enough, Tamiflu could provide some protection. Tamiflu is a pill that must be taken twice a day for five days.

When the panel moderator asked the three doctors whether they had Tamiflu in their personal possession, Dr. Redlener said yes, Dr. Karesh said no, and Dr. Heymann declined to answer the question.

Answering questions from the press following the panel discussion, Dr. Redlener said that the message of the panel discussion is we need to prepare “upstream” for a possible pandemic, not wait until large numbers of people contract it and are hospitalized.

None of the doctors were able to predict the odds of a bird flu pandemic, but many scientists and physicians have noted that the Asian bird flu has only been transmitted directly from infected birds to humans and that to become transmissible from human to human it would have to go through several mutations that might make it less lethal.

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When asked why there was so much concern, Dr. Redlener pointed out that the Asian bird flu was a virulent strain that killed 50% of the human victims infected by birds.

For more information about the TIME Global Health Summit, or for webcasts, transcripts, downloadable photos and breaking news, log on to www.time.com/globalhealth.

TIME.com features an ongoing blog by TIME's team of science and health writers throughout the Summit.

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