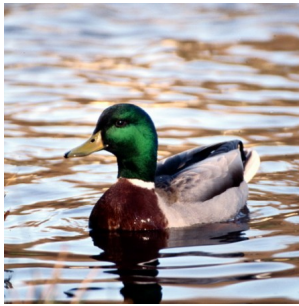


Avian Flu Discussions in Paris



Illness while traveling is most unpleasant, but a pandemic could be disastrous, especially to economies based on tourism and travel.

Travel and tourism officials from 30 countries were addressed by UN influenza coordinator Dr. David Nabarro in Paris at a meeting organized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss coordination within countries and across borders in the event of a regional or global crisis such as a rapidly spreading outbreak of a new strain of influenza virus. According to Dr. Nabarro, good planning is the key to protecting the interests of all concerned, whether that be travelers or companies. Across the whole sector, arrangements need to be in place for the effective direction of staff, there must be a fully prepared work force, and clear procedures for customer and workplace safety have to be ready. Geoffrey Lipman, Assistant Secretary-General of UNWTO, claims that there are over two million travelers abroad at any given time. He said that, although there is no immediate threat from avian flu, "The tourism sector is committed to being fully prepared in the event of a pandemic".

The 2004 outbreak of SARS in East Asia resulted in \$50 billion in economic damage overall, and sent tourism in the region into a temporary tailspin. If avian influenza were to transmute into a strain rapidly transmissible among humans, the economic consequences would be severe. Any pandemic would be most dangerous (from an economic point of view) for those involved in livestock and poultry, but it would also affect pharmaceutical and health care companies and also banks dealing with stocks or insurance and re-insurance.

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