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HHS ORDERS AVIAN FLU VACCINE DOSES AS PREVENTIVE MEASURE

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson announced today the awarding of a contract to Aventis Pasteur Inc. to manufacture and store 2 million doses of avian influenza H5N1 vaccine, an important initial acquisition to better prepare the nation for an influenza pandemic.

The vaccine that is being made is designed to match the H5N1 influenza virus that has killed 29 people in Thailand and Vietnam this year. If a pandemic of avian influenza virus H5N1 occurred in humans, the new vaccine would be used to protect laboratory workers, public health personnel, and, if needed, the general public.

“This is an important first step toward preparing our nation to respond to a pandemic influenza outbreak,” Secretary Thompson said. “The reemergence of the avian flu in Asia this year is another sign that we have to develop and produce vaccines against the threat of a pandemic flu. The United States is the first nation to undertake this preventive measure on this scale.”

The amount of the contract is nearly \$13 million. The purchase of the new vaccine follows Secretary Thompson’s announcement last month of the National Pandemic Influenza Response and Preparedness Plan, which outlines a coordinated national strategy to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic. The draft plan can be found online at <http://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/pandemicplan> and is a result of years of work by the department.

Influenza is a serious disease that causes significant death and disability in the United States every year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 200,000 cases of influenza require hospitalization and as many as 36,000 people die from influenza or its complications annually.

Influenza pandemics are explosive global events in which most, if not all, persons worldwide are at risk for infection and illness. While rare, the appearance of such a pandemic virus will likely be unaffected by currently available influenza vaccines that are modified each year to match the strains of the virus that are known to be in circulation among humans around the world. Unlike the gradual changes that occur in the influenza viruses that appear each year during flu season, a pandemic influenza virus is one that represents a major, sudden shift in the virus’ structure that increases its ability to cause illness in a large proportion of the population. During previous influenza pandemics large numbers of people were ill, sought medical care, were hospitalized and died.

Three influenza pandemics occurred during the 20th century. The most recent influenza pandemic occurred in 1968 with the Hong Kong Flu outbreak, which resulted in nearly 34,000 deaths in the United States. In 1957, the Asian flu pandemic resulted in about 70,000 deaths. The most deadly influenza

pandemic outbreak was the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, which caused illness in roughly 20 to 40 percent of the world's population and more than 50 million deaths worldwide. Between September 1918 and April 1919, approximately 675,000 deaths from the Spanish flu occurred in the United States alone.

Planning and implementing preparedness activities are critical to improving the effectiveness of a response and decreasing the impacts of a pandemic. HHS has increased support for pandemic influenza activities and is engaged in several efforts to enhance the nation's preparedness for such an outbreak.

HHS supports pandemic influenza activities in areas such as surveillance, vaccine development and production, antiviral stockpiling, research, and public health preparedness. This contract is administered jointly by HHS' National Vaccine Program Office, Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness, and CDC.

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