

Are we awaiting a bird flu pandemic?

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Singapore: In a study published in the journal *Nature*, scientists have cautioned that the deadly bird flu virus that is currently wreaking havoc in China and parts of Taiwan has mutated frequently and may soon swell up to be a pandemic afflicting humans.

Researchers highlighted that rapid mutation of the virus has resulted in emergence of virulent strains which may be spread to humans and cause severe infections. "This virus is more dangerous," said Ms Yi Guan, University of Hong Kong, one of the author of the study.

According to the World Health Organization many people suffered from respiratory distress and pneumonia upon infection. "Given the current pattern of dissemination, it will only be a matter of time before poultry movements spreads this virus beyond China by cross-border trade," reserachers added.

Ms Guan further emphasized that adequate steps must be urgently taken to arrest the spread of the virus. "Unless that happens," the researchers wrote, "it is reasonable to expect the H7N9 and other viruses to persist and cause a substantial number of severe human infections."