

Can you buy a synthetic version of the deadly 1918 influenza? There's no law against it—and that has security experts worried

In the past few years, something new has become possible in biology: cheaply “printing” DNA for insertion into a cell.

That means a scientist who needs a particular DNA sequence to, say, create new bacteria for research can now order that DNA sequence from a lab. ...

But as is often the case when a scientific field gets a lot better at what it does very quickly, progress in DNA synthesis has been so fast that coordination against bad actors has lagged.

...

Some companies — including most industry-leading ones — do follow US guidelines that require a background check and also check the DNA sequence against a list of known hazardous ones and would stop me from making this dangerous order — but a [recent report](#) found no evidence of any laws requiring laboratories to follow those guidelines in any country in the world. Doing so adds some time and expense to the ordering process, so there is some incentive to cut corners.

That's why many experts argue that we need to do better. Their proposals on how to fix the system vary, but they all agree on one thing: I shouldn't be allowed to order myself the 1918 influenza or a new coronavirus off the internet and have it delivered to my home.

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