

## Another pandemic? New swine flu identified in China could jump to humans

[A] new finding that pigs in China are more and more frequently becoming infected with a strain of influenza that has the potential to jump to humans has infectious disease researchers worldwide taking serious notice. Robert Webster, an influenza investigator who recently retired from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, says it's a "guessing game" as to whether this strain will mutate to readily transmit between humans, which it has not done yet. "We just do not know a pandemic is going to occur until the damn thing occurs," Webster says.

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The virus is a unique blend of three lineages: one similar to strains found in European and Asian birds, the H1N1 strain that caused the 2009 pandemic, and a North American H1N1 that has genes from avian, human, and pig influenza viruses.

The G4 variant is especially concerning because its core is an avian influenza virus—to which humans have no immunity—with bits of mammalian strains mixed in.

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In addition to stepping up surveillance, [researcher Sun Hongei] says it makes sense to develop a vaccine against G4 for both pigs and humans. Webster says at the very least, the seed stock to make a human vaccine—variants of a strain that grow rapidly in the eggs used to make a flu vaccine—should be produced now.

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