Discovery Medicine

Medicine on the Leading Edge

Volume 4, Number 24 December 2004

Content Highlights

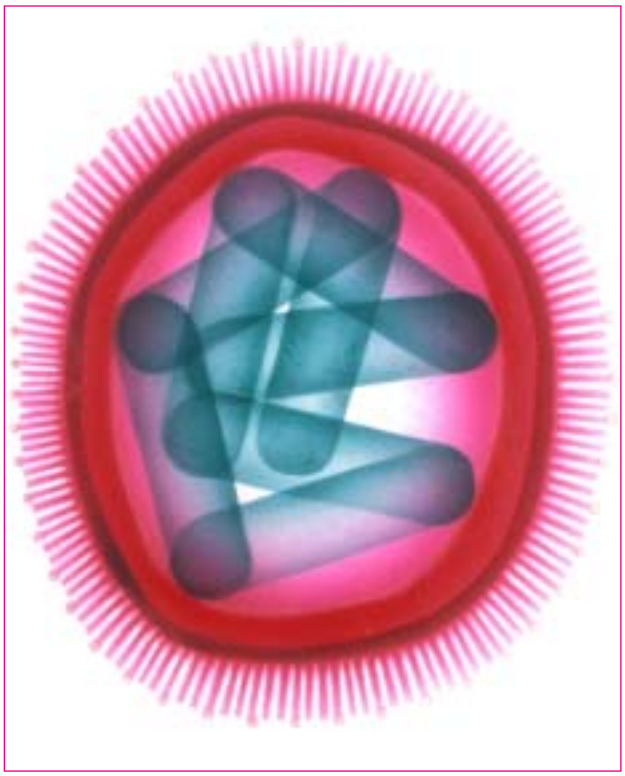

Photo Researchers

Influenza Virus: A Time Bomb?

Pages 371, 378, 482

Editor's Note

An influenza pandemic of the magnitude seen in 1918 could happen again. In recent years there has been an escalating frequency of outbreaks of poultry flu that has also infected humans. Citing these alarming events, Klaus Stohr, head of flu surveillance at the World Health Organization, declared recently that a global influenza pandemic is closer than in previous generations. Center for Disease Control and Prevention Director Julie Gerberding has pointed out the unprecedented increase in air travel in recent decades – a sharp contrast with the early 20th Century when the influenza was carried by only a small number of world travelers who reached their destinations by ship.

However, modern technology, the knowledge and experience so far accumulated, and the speed with which we may produce an effective vaccine, all should limit the magnitude of devastation from a pandemic compared with that seen by humanity in 1918.

Currently, to produce the majority of flu vaccines, virus is grown in chicken eggs, a slow approach that takes months and is prone to contamination. This would not be a practical way to produce a vaccine from a new virus that is raging in an epidemic or pandemic. Researchers are looking for methods to safely and rapidly produce the virus in cell cultures in large quantity.

By the way it mutates, influenza virus is a time bomb. There is a race to develop a new technology for speedy vaccine production before the next pandemic. Winning the race could greatly limit future carnage.

Noel R. Rose, M.D., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
Benjamin Yang, M.D., Ph.D.
Executive Editor

Editors

Discovery Medicine (ISSN 1539-6509) is published bi-monthly by Peter H. Rheinstein, M.D., J.D., 57 W. Timonium Rd., Ste. 207, Timonium, MD 21093-3105. Application to mail at Periodicals postage rates is pending at Timonium, MD 21093 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Peter H. Rheinstein, 57 W. Timonium Rd., Ste. 207, Timonium, MD 21093-3105.

Annual subscription rates: Personal print or digital edition, $39.95; institutional print plus digital edition, $349. Group bulk subscriptions are available at a reduced rate schedule which is provided upon request.

Contact/Service
57 W. Timonium Rd., Ste. 207
Timonium, MD 21093, USA
Phone: 410-252-3631
Fax: 410-252-3634
service@discoverymedicine.com
www.discoverymedicine.com