

An Urgent Topic: What Are Avian Flu and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome? How Should These Diseases Be Deal with?

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We are again experiencing the fear of exposure to infection by a new type of virus. Avian flu has now spread to poultry in Southeast Asia, and millions of birds have died. In addition, human deaths due to infection with the virus have been reported. The worst-case scenario assumes that 3 billion of people will be infected and die around 5 hundred million in the world. This closely resembles to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic last year. SARS suddenly appeared in South China in 2002 and swept through many countries worldwide including Taiwan, Southeast Asia, the USA, Canada, and Europe. SARS and avian flu cause widespread anxiety and have a serious effect on global economic activities. These are typical emerging infectious diseases, and it is urgent to take appropriate social defense against these pathogens.

At this symposium, we would like to: (i) review the pathophysiology and epidemiology of avian flu and SARS and point out the problems associated with them; (ii) review emerging and reemerging infectious diseases that have recently occurred on a worldwide scale; (iii) discuss approaches to developing new therapies for SARS from the viewpoint of drug discovery based on genomic information; and (iv) administrative interventions by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare to control infectious diseases.