

Bioterrorism and bird flu

In December 2011, the US National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity asked the journals *Science* and *Nature* to redact details of a study about an easily transmitted form of the H5N1 virus for fear it could be misused by bioterrorists. Maryam Omid considers whether the censorship request was valid.



In December 2011, the US National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity [asked](#) the journals *Science* and *Nature* to redact details of a study about an easily transmitted form of the H5N1 virus, or bird flu as it is commonly known, for fear it could be misused by bioterrorists. The strain, created by scientists in the US and the Netherlands, is transmissible between ferrets, usually a sign that a virus may be communicable between humans. The impact of the fatal virus has been minimal to date because of its inability to jump from human to human.

As of January 2012, the journals were resisting the request to expunge information about the research on the grounds that scientists need access to the data to be able to prepare for the possibility of a mutation in nature. *Science* editor-in-chief Bruce Alberts is in negotiation with the government to set up a system that would allow international researchers access to the information

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following a stringent vetting procedure. He has [said](#) that knowledge about the virus “could well be essential for speeding the development of new treatments to combat this lethal form of influenza”.

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