The Real Swine Flu Hysteria

May 5, 2009 By Paul Dalton

The wisdom du jour is that the H1N1 influenza, or 'Swine Flu', story has been over hyped by the media. I actually don't think that is the case on the whole, but that is not what I want to write about today.

No, what I want to talk about is a real example of hysteria in the media: a UPI article raising the specter of HIV combining with H1N1 to form the WORST VIRUS EVER!

Pure hysteria- and very poor journalism.

Most of the story is about whether or not the reaction to the emergence of H1N1 by world governments was proper. Buried in the story however is this outrageous sentence: "Health authorities are particularly worried that the capability to mutate already exhibited by the virus could eventually let it combine with the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS."

Oh, please.

The story does not say who these health authorities are or on what basis they are concerned that these two very dissimilar viruses are going to somehow combine. The writer, or these 'health authorities' seem to betray a real lack of understanding of the basics of virology.

The article cites the influenza viruses ability to mutate as the basis for this fear. How do influenza viruses mutate? In two important ways: First through random mutation- where genetic changes happen literally by mistake. The second is through recombination- that is the mixing of genes from different strains of the virus.

The same can be said for HIV. HIV is able to mutate quite well. It mutates through the same two pathways as influenza- so isn't that scary? Not really. Both viruses recombine with variants of themselves- not with entirely different, not closely related viruses.

I am not what you would call an expert in molecular biology, but a quick look at the structure and viral life of cycle of influenza suggest to me that these two viruses are far too dissimilar to ever combine.

This is an old story recycled. I remember back in the 1980s, when 'health experts' warned of the possibility of HIV combining with common cold viruses and wiping out humanity.

So those of living with HIV don't need to lose any sleep that our bodies are the microbial mixing vessels giving rise to the super virus to end all super viruses.

The UPI should be ashamed of themselves.

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