

Washington File

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U.S., Singapore Renew Support for Emerging Diseases Center

Nations cooperate on preventing, addressing emerging disease in Southeast Asia

The governments of the United States and Singapore signed a historic agreement November 22, renewing their commitment to work together to prevent and respond to pandemic influenza and other emerging diseases in Southeast Asia.

The agreement provides for the operation of the Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention (REDI) Center, which will offer an early warning system and research center for infectious diseases in Asia.

U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt heralded the new agreement as "an important step in building a global network of surveillance that will help us detect disease outbreaks before they spread."

President Bush and Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong first announced the commitment at the 2003 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting. The REDI Center officially opened in May 2004 at Singapore's Biopolis hub for biomedical research.

This November 22 agreement follows an earlier memorandum of understanding between the Singapore Ministry of Health and HHS, pledging to cooperate on a range of health issues, in particular emerging infectious diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome and bird flu. (See [related article](#).)

"It is a timely agreement," Leavitt said, "given the urgency of our efforts to prepare for a global pandemic, and it supports President Bush's aims in bringing together nations of the world in the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza to address this worldwide threat."

The agreement establishes the REDI Center as an international organization with a governing board and scientific advisory group to extend the perimeter of defense for emerging infectious diseases, broaden the international network for research in

emerging infectious diseases, and translate research findings into improved public health.

The governing board and scientific advisory group includes HHS representatives from the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Vaccine Program Office, and the Office of Global Health Affairs.

Singapore members include representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Biomedical Research Council, the National University of Singapore, the Health Sciences Authority, and the Genome Institute of Singapore in Singapore.

The REDI Center will soon work with neighboring countries to help address the avian influenza situation in Southeast Asia.

The REDI Center and the Ministry of Health are also working on three technical assistance training courses for Indonesia on infection control, outbreak response and laboratory techniques.

Upcoming joint projects include collaboration with the Department of Energy Argonne National Laboratory and other U.S. and Singapore agencies to conduct a five-day workshop on public health emergency preparedness.

For additional information on the avian influenza and efforts to combat it, see [Bird Flu](#).

Text of the joint press statement follows:

(begin text)

Joint Statement:

U.S. Embassy Singapore
The Ministry of Health, Singapore
Press release, November 25, 2005

SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE REGIONAL EMERGING DISEASES INTERVENTION CENTER (REDI)

The Governments of the United States and Singapore on November 22, 2005, signed an historic agreement renewing their joint commitment to work together to prevent and respond to pandemic influenza and other emerging diseases in Southeast Asia.

The document provides for the operation of the Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention (REDI) Center, and follows an earlier Memorandum of Understanding between the Singapore Ministry of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) pledging to cooperate on a range of health issues, in particular emerging infectious diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and avian influenza.

President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong initially announced their joint commitment at the 2003 APEC Leaders' Meeting. The REDI Center was officially opened on May 24, 2004 at Singapore's Biopolis hub for biomedical research.

"This is an important step in building a global network of surveillance that will help us detect disease outbreaks before they spread so we can better protect the American people and people all over the world," HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt said. "It is a timely agreement, given the urgency of our efforts to prepare for a global pandemic, and it supports President Bush's aims in bringing together nations of the world in the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza to address this worldwide threat."

The agreement establishes the REDI Center as an international organization with a Governing Board and Scientific Advisory Group to accomplish the following:

- Extend the perimeter of defence for emerging infectious diseases and health security threats.
- Widen the international network for research in emerging infectious diseases.
- Translate the findings of research into improved public health.

In the near future, the REDI Center will be working with neighboring countries to provide advice and consultation to address the avian influenza situation in Southeast Asia, specifically responding to requests for assistance from Indonesia and Vietnam, and addressing concerns about infection control in hospitals in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Some of the projects include collaboration with Argonne National Laboratory and other U.S. and Singapore agencies to conduct a 5-day workshop on public health emergency preparedness. The program endorsed by the APEC Health Task Force, is aimed at promoting integrated emergency preparedness for communicable disease outbreaks within and among participant economies to enhance security. In addition, the REDI Center and MOH are working on three technical assistance training courses offered to our Indonesian neighbors on infection control, outbreak response and laboratory techniques.

"The threat of an outbreak of pandemic influenza is real. An influenza virus strain with potential to cause a pandemic of human disease could emerge with little or no warning and in almost any part of the world," Secretary Leavitt said. "We cannot afford to ignore this threat, and we are pleased to be working with Singapore, as part of our international pandemic preparedness and response efforts."

Background information on REDI Center

The REDI Center officially opened in May 2004 to provide early warnings on any impending infectious disease outbreak or bioterrorist threat in the region, especially those with potential for international spread. The joint facility enables both countries to leverage on the U.S. CDC's experience and expertise in surveillance and control of communicable disease outbreaks.

The Governing Board and Scientific Advisory Group includes HHS representatives from the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Vaccine Program Office, and the Office of Global Health Affairs, along with Singaporean representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Biomedical Research Council, the National University of Singapore, the Health Sciences Authority, and the Genome Institute of Singapore in Singapore.

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