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Abbott talks of travel ban if bird flu hits

CANBERRA — Interstate travel and public gatherings could be banned amid an outbreak of the deadly bird flu virus in Australia.

Health Minister Tony Abbott said that the Government was considering the bans as part of plans to tackle the possible spread of bird flu across the country.

“Cancellation of interstate travel, border closures between different parts of the country, cancellation of large public gatherings (are being considered),” he said.

Mr Abbott’s comments came as he and counterparts from 30 countries wrapped up a two-day bird flu summit in Ottawa.

They called for a united international effort to prevent a pandemic, with the shortage of anti-viral drugs at the top of the agenda.

But Mr Abbott dismissed plans by India and Taiwan to allow drug makers in their countries to copy the antiviral drug Tamiflu without obtaining a licence from its Swiss-based patent holder Roche Holdings AG.

Australian National University researchers also argue Australia should consider locally producing mass supplies of antiviral drugs to prepare for a pandemic.

“This idea that we could have as much Tamiflu as we want if only Roche would allow people is just not right,” Mr Abbott said.