



Date: Thursday, 27 October 2005  
Page Number: 4  
Edition: First  
Supplement: Main

Market: Geelong  
Circulation: 27,013  
Published: MON TO SAT  
Editorial: [email the editor](mailto:email_the_editor)  
Item No: P8068283

Size: 222.24 sq. cm.

# Flu outbreak bans: Abbott

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

Health Minister Tony Abbott said 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



**Tony Abbott says interstate travel could be banned should bird flu sweep Australia.**

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.

He also defended Australia's readiness to deal with a pandemic amid fierce criticism by bird flu expert Dr Graeme Laver that the government's plans to cope with the deadly virus are flawed.

"Australia, if I may say so, has been a bit ahead of the game," Mr Abbott said.

"We've been very quick building up our antiviral stockpile."

Meanwhile, Australia has lifted its ban on live bird imports from Canada but toughened up rules for the trade.

From yesterday, all live birds being sent to Australia will have to be tested for avian flu.

Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran said he decided against imposing a total ban on live bird imports but would increase security regulations to force exporting countries to test birds for avian flu

before they arrive in Australia.

"The Australian government will require all future imports of live birds and hatching eggs to be tested negative for both avian influenza antibodies and virus before shipment to Australia," he said.

Australia banned all live bird imports from Canada last week after three racing pigeons sent to Australia tested positive to antibodies for a strain of avian flu.

Canada's Agriculture Minister Andy Mitchell welcomed Australia's decision to lift the ban.

He said Australian and Canadian officials had aligned their import and export procedures in recent days, adding that Canada could also meet the new rules imposed by Australia.

— AAP

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