

## **Killer flu virus mistakenly sent worldwide** (Thu 14 Apr, 2005)

### **WARM-UPS**

**CHAT:** Talk in pairs or groups about: flu / accidents / WHO / people under 36 / laboratories / immunity / biohazards / virus / bioterrorism. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**VIRUS BRAINSTORM:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “virus”. Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

**MISTAKES:** Your task is to find out the kind of mistakes your classmates have made. Talk to as many people you can about their biggest / costliest / funniest / most regrettable / most annoying... mistakes. In pairs / groups talk about the mistakes you heard about and hold an “Academy Award” ceremony for those who made the best or most interesting mistakes.

**MY FLU HISTORY:** Brainstorm all of the symptoms of colds and flu. Interview your partner / group members about these symptoms and how flu and colds affect their lives. Ask many questions because you suspect your partner / one of your classmates may be carrying a deadly virus and need to know about their every sniff and sneeze.

**OPINIONS:** Look at the following opinions and discuss them with your partner / group:

- a. Everyone makes mistakes. We're only human.
- b. One of these days someone will make a huge mistake. Security must be tighter.
- c. I'm amazed terrorists haven't yet got their hands on viruses.
- d. The WHO does such a great job.
- e. The person responsible for this mistake should be fired immediately.
- f. It's scary to think of all the biohazardous and nuclear materials that are sent around the world every minute of every day.
- g. Wow. I'd hate to work in such a dangerous job.
- h. I don't feel too good. I wonder if I have the flu.
- i. I think a virus killed off the dinosaurs and will do the same to us.
- j. One day, all viruses will be things of the past.

## PRE-READING IDEAS

**WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words 'flu' and 'strain'.

**TRUE FALSE:** Guess whether the following statements about the article are true or false:

- a. A lethal influenza virus was mistakenly mailed to people's homes. T / F
- b. The virus killed 4 million people in the late '50s. T / F
- c. The virus has been sent to 118 countries. T / F
- d. The WHO has quarantined laboratory workers as a safety measure. T / F
- e. The strain of flu is highly contagious. T / F
- f. People over the age of 36 are safe – they are immune to the virus. T / F
- g. The WHO said the risk of a global pandemic is high. T / F
- h. The WHO was worried about the threat of bioterrorism . T / F

**SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) trigger      | equipment               |
| (b) accidentally | jabs (UK) / shots (USA) |
| (c) killed       | minimal                 |
| (d) kits         | fears                   |
| (e) case         | spark                   |
| (f) real         | tangible                |
| (g) concerns     | wiped out               |
| (h) inoculations | safeguards              |
| (i) low          | erroneously             |
| (j) precautions  | occurrence              |

**PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (a) has the                      | a global pandemic                |
| (b) trigger                      | contagious                       |
| (c) influenza                    | occurred                         |
| (d) The mistake                  | inoculations                     |
| (e) respiratory                  | posting the error on its website |
| (f) concerns about a pandemic    | potential to                     |
| (g) highly                       | disease                          |
| (h) flu                          | are followed                     |
| (i) proper biosafety precautions | pandemic                         |
| (j) the WHO delayed              | are real                         |

**SPOT THE MISTAKES:** Half of the words in bold in each paragraph are right and half are wrong. Circle the incorrect words and try to replace them with words that fit.

### **Killer flu virus mistakenly sent worldwide**

**BNE:** A lethal influenza virus that has the potential to **trigger** a global pandemic has been accidentally sent to thousands of laboratories around the **hemisphere**. The World Health Organization has urged the labs to “immediately” destroy samples of a flu **strain** that killed almost 4 **billion** people in the 1957-58 Asian influenza pandemic. The mistake **recurred** when the College of American Pathologists included the deadly H2N2 virus in testing **kits** that laboratories use to determine their ability to identify various **viruses**. The samples were sent to 3,747 laboratories in 18 countries. The WHO has asked that, “any **container** of respiratory disease among laboratory workers be investigated and notified to national authorities”.

WHO concerns about a pandemic are **real** because the strain of flu is **lowly** contagious, especially among those under 36 who have no **immunity** to it. It has not been included in flu **inoculations** since 1968, which is when the H2N2 virus vanished. The WHO said it “is taking **stairs** to ensure the rapid destruction of this material”. Its website says the danger of a pandemic is low: “The likelihood of laboratory-**inquired** influenza infection is considered low when proper biosafety precautions are followed. The risk for the **general** population is also considered low.” However, the WHO delayed posting the error on its website until after the affected laboratories were informed, to avoid the **treat** of bioterrorism.

## **HOMEWORK**

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google’s search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information on the WHO. Share your findings with your class next lesson.
- 3. ANGRY LETTER:** Write a letter to the College of American Pathologists expressing your outrage at this mistake. Read it to your class in your next lesson.
- 4. ONE VIRUS:** Write a short article about one virus that has been in the news recently. Talk about your article in your next class.

## DISCUSSION:

- a. Did anything in this article make you think?
- b. Was there anything in this article that made you worry?
- c. Are you feeling OK today?
- d. How often do you come down with colds or the flu?
- e. How badly do you suffer from colds or the flu?
- f. Do you have a strong constitution?
- g. What do you think of the mistake in this article?
- h. Should anyone be reprimanded or punished for this mistake?
- i. Are you careful to avoid contact with viruses in your everyday life?
- j. How often do you wash your hands?
- k. What do you do when someone near coughs or sneezes incessantly?
- l. Do you ever get a flu shot / jab?
- m. Would you like to work in a virus research laboratory?
- n. What would you do right this minute if a newsflash appeared on TV alerting of a pandemic in your city?
- o. Are you more worried about epidemics and pandemics because of SARS, bird flu and the more recent Marburg virus in Angola?
- p. Will a cure for the common cold ever be found?
- q. Do you think scientists will get the better of viruses one day?
- r. Will terrorists ever get their hands on a virus and release it?
- s. Which single virus would you like to see eradicated?
- t. Did you like this discussion?
- u. Teacher / Student additional questions.

## TEXT

### **Killer flu virus mistakenly sent worldwide**

**BNE:** A lethal influenza virus that has the potential to **trigger** a global pandemic has been accidentally sent to thousands of laboratories around the **world**. The World Health Organization has urged the labs to “immediately” destroy samples of a flu **strain** that killed almost 4 **million** people in the 1957-58 Asian influenza pandemic. The mistake **occurred** when the College of American Pathologists included the deadly H2N2 virus in testing **kits** that laboratories use to determine their ability to identify various **viruses**. The samples were sent to 3,747 laboratories in 18 countries. The WHO has asked that, “any **case** of respiratory disease among laboratory workers be investigated and notified to national authorities”.

WHO concerns about a pandemic are **real** because the strain of flu is **highly** contagious, especially among those under 36 who have no **immunity** to it. It has not been included in flu **inoculations** since 1968, which is when the H2N2 virus vanished. The WHO said it “is taking **steps** to ensure the rapid destruction of this material”. Its website says the danger of a pandemic is low: “The likelihood of laboratory-**acquired** influenza infection is considered low when proper biosafety precautions are followed. The risk for the **general** population is also considered low.” However, the WHO delayed posting the error on its website until after the affected laboratories were informed, to avoid the **threat** of bioterrorism.

Find this and similar lessons at <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com>

## EXTRA FLUENCY ACTIVITIES

**PANDEMIC PLAN:** You are the head of your town's government. In pairs / groups, create an emergency plan on what citizens should do if a lethal virus hits your region. Some the following may be important in your plans: hospitals / TV stations / water supplies / army / vaccines / international help / animals ...

When you have finished, change partners / groups and explain your plans. It is your job to pick holes in the plans of your new partner. Your new partner must justify his / her plan.

**VIRUS ROLE PLAY:** Use the following role play cards in a discussion about the H2N2 virus. Team up with partners to discuss your roles and "strategy" before the role play begins. After the role play, discuss whether you really believed what you were saying.

### THE ROLES:

Student A

You think you sent the virus around the world. You accept full responsibility and apologize for everything every time someone is angry with you.

Student B

You are a Student B's coworker. You have information that proves Student A did not send the lethal virus around the world. The information is top secret. You must defend Student A.

Student C

You are the president of the laboratory that sent the influenza strains around the world. You are very embarrassed about the affair – apologize to everyone. You are furious with Student A and want him / her fired.

Student D

You are a paparazzi reporter. You think you have a great story. You know that if you can make a link between Student A and international bioterrorists, you can sell your story for \$1,729,938.

Student E

You are a police officer from Interpol. You suspect Student A is part of an international terrorism ring. You have information that indicates Student A wants to sell the virus to terrorists.

Student F

You are president of your own laboratory. You are 35. Last week you received one of the virus testing kits. Today you have a bad cold and respiratory problems. You want to sue Student C.

Student G

You are the mother / father of Student A. You know butter wouldn't melt in his / her mouth and that she / he wouldn't hurt a fly. Protect your son / daughter.

Student H

You love the sound of your own voice. Agree or disagree with anyone at any time. You just love talking.