

## Exercise, diet lower blood pressure

Continued from page 1B

plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods; choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium and drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation.

High blood pressure occurs more often among African Americans than whites. It begins at an earlier age and is usually more severe, according to the institute. African Americans also have a higher death rate from stroke and kidney disease than whites.

One out of every four

## CDC watches for illness

Continued from page 1B

is no crystal ball to look into," said Dr. Corrie Brown, a University of Georgia professor and member of the Secretary of Agriculture's advisory committee for animal and poultry diseases.

Health officials say there's no evidence yet of any new outbreaks threatening humans, but they are closely watching a few likely suspects.

At the top of the list is influenza. Up to 50 million people died in the flu pandemic of 1918-1919, the worst flu outbreak in recent history. Because flu strains mutate and swap genes with other flu viruses, health officials fear that another powerful strain could strike at any time.

"Most of us in infectious diseases are waiting for an influenza pandemic," said Dr. Mark Smolinski, a former CDC official who helped investigate hantavirus when that disease first appeared in 1993 in the United States.

The avian influenza outbreak earlier this year in Asia scared health officials, as it hit eight Asian countries, killing 24 people in Vietnam and Thailand. About 100 million chickens in Asia either died from the illness or were slaughtered to prevent its spread.

"It's the first time we've ever had an avian flu epidemic in multiple countries at one time of a highly pathogenic strain," said Smolinski, now acting vice president of biological programs at the nonprofit Nuclear Threat Institute.

Another concern are diseases transmitted by insects. The mosquito-borne West Nile virus came to the United States in 1999 and has spread across the continental United States.

That experience has made health officials wary of Rift Valley fever, another mosquito-borne disease, but one that is much deadlier than West Nile. Rift Valley fever has a mortality rate of up to 26 percent, compared to West Nile, which kills up to 10 percent of those it infects.

"If we get Rift Valley fever in the United States, it would make West Nile look like a hiccup," Brown said. "It was heavily investigated during the Cold War as a good way to immobilize troops."

Once confined to Africa, Rift Valley fever entered the Arabian peninsula for the first time four years ago. It's believed to have spread through exported livestock. About 95 people died from it in Saudi Arabia in 2000.

The concern in the United States over the Rift Valley fever is that about 25 different kinds of domestic mosquitoes could carry the virus if it reaches North America.

The pig-borne Nipah virus, discovered in 1998 in Malaysia, "has surfaced periodically in the swine populations," said Dr. Nina Marano, acting associate director for veterinary medicine and public health for the CDC.

adults have high blood pressure, it can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and is one of the leading causes of death in the U.S.

Along with exercise, diet is important in controlling blood pressure. The institute suggests using the DASH (dietary approaches to stop hypertension) eating plan.

The plan, according to the guide, emphasizes eating

fresh fruits and vegetables and low fat dairy products as well as reducing the sodium intake.

"Starting on the DASH eating plan is fairly easy. It requires no special foods and has no hard to follow recipes," the guide states.

For more information, log on to the institute's web site: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/index.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/index.html)

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