

narios, "a key focus has been on giving our people timely information on what is happening and what our response will be," says Dr. Sol Sax, chief medical officer.

These measures, however, raise uncomfortable questions. Yes, people should stay home if they are sick. But many will insist on coming in because they fear losing wages or their jobs, says Kim Elliott, deputy director of the nonprofit Trust for America's Health. "Will Wal-Mart pay its hourly workers for not coming in?" she asks. Some companies have assured employees that they will continue to pay wages even if sequestered staff can't work.

A different set of questions revolves

## Understanding Avian Flu—and precautions to take

**"Our job is to inform but not inflame"** A Q&A with Secretary of Health & Human Services Michael O. Leavitt  
**Corporate Responsibility** 10 steps companies can take to protect employees—and their businesses

**Under the Microscope** A primer on avian flu

**"Eerie" Discoveries about Flu** How the 1918 strain helps us understand the current disease

**BusinessWeek** online

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around how much business should be spending on preparations. Steps such as cross-training employees or installing new networking technology for telecommuting are expensive. "It's not in the best interest of the shareholders

to overinvest," cautions Pitney Bowes's Crews.

But health officials fear that a wait-and-hope approach could put the economy in a serious bind if the worst happens. "The business community, like the rest of society, is not adequately prepared," warns U.S. Health & Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt. Hurricane Katrina already taught this country the perils of ignoring warnings. Unless they heed that lesson, companies in the

U.S. and around the world could be in for something far more devastating if a flu pandemic materializes. ■

—With Amy Barrett in Philadelphia, Nanette Byrnes in New York, Rachel Tiplady in Paris, and bureau reports

## FLU WATCH

# Prevent a Pandemic, Make a Profit

**D**aniel R. Dwight didn't intend to cash in on the threat of a flu pandemic. Five years ago his Belmont (Mass.)-based company, Kronos Advanced Technologies Inc., set out to make a fan with no moving parts. The secret: put high voltage across an array of wires. That creates a flow of charged particles—ions—strong enough to pull air along. Early tests, though, showed an unexpected benefit: The electrical field also rips molecules apart, destroying pathogens such as anthrax spores or flu viruses. Of course, this feature wasn't a big selling point in those pre-September 11 days. "When we said 'anthrax,' people gave a yawn," recalls Dwight.

They aren't so bored now. Kronos' virus killer "could be a hell of a device" for filtering air everywhere from hospitals to airplanes, says Peter Goelz, former managing director of the National Transportation Safety Board. Kronos has begun to talk with Korean Air and Singapore Airlines Ltd., two carriers badly hit by the Asian SARS epidemic of 2003. "We can't keep up with the calls," says Dwight.

Where there's disaster, there's opportunity for business. Consultants such as Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. and Kroll Inc. are already selling advice to business and governments on flu preparedness.

Companies are stocking up on items thought to slow the spread of disease such as masks and hand sanitizers—potential sales for companies like Beijing-based Kimberly-Clark (China) Investment Co. President Stephen Shao says his company is already developing new lines of medical masks, wipes, and hand-washing liquids.

Public health officials say that with the right early warning systems, they could spot a dangerous flu strain soon enough to snuff it out. The pot of gold: \$1 billion-plus that countries have proposed to spend on enhancing global biohazard surveillance. Enter Applied Biosystems, the company that made the advanced sequencers that deciphered the human genome. "We are taking capabilities developed over the last 25 years to make this early warning system available," says Christopher P. Melançon, director of biosecurity in the company's Applied Markets Div. On Nov. 8 the Foster

City (Calif.) company unveiled a device that can detect the flu virus in two hours and a genetic decoding kit to find potentially deadly mutations.

Other players see an opening. By yearend, CombiMatrix Corp. of Mukilteo, Wash., plans to deliver to the U.S. Air Force prototypes of a lab-on-a-microchip device

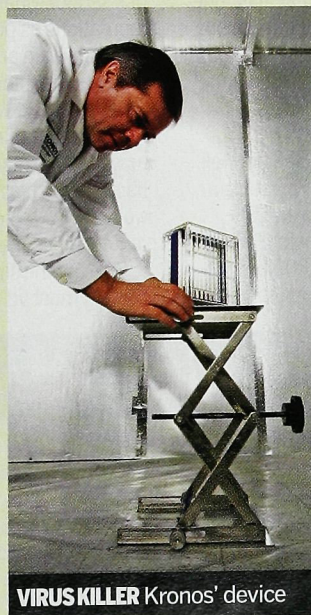
that can diagnose particular strains of avian flu in four hours.

If one of these new detectors does sound the alarm, governments will embark on a crash program to develop a vaccine. That would be good for the bottom lines at flu vaccine makers Sanofi Pasteur and Chiron Corp. "We are in possession of some key technologies that will be very, very useful in addressing a pandemic," says Chiron CEO Howard Pien.

Other possibilities for profit will surely emerge. "Crisis is an opportunity as long as you see it first," says Christian Crews,

director of futures strategy at Pitney Bowes Inc. He should know: Anthrax-infected letters in 2001 created a whole new business—making the mail safe—for his company. Even a disaster such as a global flu pandemic will make someone richer.

—By John Carey in Washington, with Otis Port in New York and Dexter Roberts in Beijing



**VIRUS KILLER** Kronos' device