A single bird-flu vaccine could protect people, birds and pets against deadly flu pandemics, according to an article in the November issue of the Journal of General Virology. United States researchers have found a vaccine based on the bird-flu virus could protect several species against different flu viruses. Professor Daniel Perez, of the University of Maryland, said the world was experiencing a pandemic of influenza in birds caused by an H5N1 virus. "The H5N1 virus also has an unusual expanded host range: not only birds and humans have been infected but also cats, which are usually resistant to influenza," he said. "To prepare for a pandemic, it would be ideal to have a vaccine that could be used in multiple animal species."

People are more likely to work for companies with initials matching their own, according to a study on the "name-letter effect". The study published in Psychological Science examined the cases where people had a preference for things with the same letter of their first name. Psychologists from Ghent University in Belgium were interested in testing the extent of the name-letter effect and if it was potent enough to affect where people chose to work. They found there were 12 per cent more matches between employee names and the company they worked for than what was expected, based on the probability estimate.

Quantum computing, promising blinding computational speed and power, is one step closer to reality, an international team of scientists say. The scientists, who include researchers with the United States Department of Energy’s Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, have reported they were able to successfully store and retrieve information using the nucleus of an atom. In a paper published in last week’s edition of the journal, Nature, the team described an experiment in which exceptionally pure and isotopically controlled crystals of silicon were precisely doped with phosphorus atoms. Quantum information was processed in phosphorus electrons, transferred to phosphorus nuclei, then subsequently transferred back to the electrons. This is the first demonstration that a single atomic nucleus can serve as quantum computational memory.

A bacteria which can protect its insect hosts from viral infections will be the subject of a seminar at the Australian National University today. Jeremy Brownlie, of the University of Queensland’s School of Integrative Biology, will discuss his recent findings on the bacteria, Wolbachia, and what they could mean for natural populations of insects. Wolbachia infect millions of different insect and spider species, living inside the host cell. The seminar, from 1pm to 2pm is at the School of Botany and Zoology seminar room, building 116, Daley Road, ANU.

The University of NSW has reported the highest efficiency of a silicon solar cell at 25 per cent. The University of NSW ARC Photovoltaic Centre of Excellence already hold the world record of 24.7 per cent. A revision of the international standard by which solar cells are measured, has delivered the 25 per cent record to the team and widened its lead on the rest of the world. The world-record holding cell was fabricated by former centre researchers, who have since left the centre to establish China Sunergy, one of the world’s largest photovoltaic manufacturers.