

Avian (Bird) Flu Fact Sheet



What is Avian Flu (Bird Flu)?

Avian flu, also known as bird flu, is an infectious disease caused by a virus that lives naturally in wild birds. Wild birds usually do not become sick. However, they carry the virus and can pass it on through their secretions to other domestic birds (chickens, turkeys, ducks). In turn, those birds can become very sick and die.

How is the virus spread to humans?

Currently, there is no evidence that bird flu is spread person-to-person. However, the virus continues to change. Humans can become infected through contact with infected birds or their contaminated droppings. The virus also can spread to humans from:

- Direct contact with infected poultry or birds
- Contact with contaminated food preparation surfaces
- Contact with items (bird cages, water, food, equipment) contaminated by an infected bird
- Contact with infected bird droppings or secretions

What are the symptoms of bird flu in humans?

Flu-like symptoms may occur after exposure to infected birds. Those symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, and eye infections. A severe case of bird flu can cause serious respiratory problems, including pneumonia.

What should I do if I have flu symptoms?

If you have symptoms of bird flu, get medical care immediately.

How is bird flu diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on the onset of symptoms within 10 days of travel to a region with documented bird flu in poultry or humans.

How is bird flu treated?

There are several influenza antiviral drugs that can be used to treat pneumonia caused by bird flu. However, some of the virus strains have become resistant to these drugs. Influenza antiviral medications are being monitored closely.

Is there a vaccine to protect humans from the bird flu virus?

No. However, vaccine development efforts are under way.

Can you catch bird flu from eating poultry?

No. The virus is transmitted primarily by contact with live poultry. Nevertheless, it is always important to thoroughly cook all poultry meat. Also, proper hand washing is important after handling raw poultry.

What is the risk to people in the U.S. from the bird flu outbreak in Asia?

The current risk in the U.S. is low. The strain of bird flu virus found in Asia has not been found in the U.S. There have been no human cases of the flu in the U.S. However, it is possible that travelers returning from affected countries in Asia could be infected.

What should travelers do when traveling to infected countries?

- Know the signs and symptoms of bird flu.
- Get up-to-date vaccinations.
- Get a physical check-up at least 4 weeks prior to travel.
- Practice good hygiene; wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid poultry farms and live animal markets.
- Do not feed pigeons or other birds.
- Wash your hands immediately after contact with birds or poultry.
- Do not eat undercooked poultry.
- Do not eat raw eggs or dip cooked food into any sauce containing raw eggs.
- Listen to the news and stay informed if there is an outbreak.

After you return from your travel:

- Monitor your health for 10 days.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms, call your doctor. It is important to tell your doctor that you have recently traveled to a country with a known bird flu outbreak.

Stay informed! Visit these websites for more information about Avian Flu.

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>
- World Health Organization: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/
- CDC Notice to Travelers: http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/avian_flu_ah5n1_031605.htm

For local information, call

FLU HOTLINE AT 209-558-8872

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools

Adapted from Alameda County Public Health Department



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