

# The Bird Flu – Frequently Asked Questions

## What everyone should know about the avian influenza.

A growing number of avian influenza (bird flu) cases are turning up among bird populations around the world. While the flu has yet to have a large scale impact on human lives and **there have been no reports of Avian Flu (strain N5H1) in North America**, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) warns that it is not a matter of **if** we will be affected, but **when**. We want you to be informed and to be prepared. The first step is to educate yourself and stay informed.

**What can I do now to protect myself, my family and my community?**

### Spread the Word, Not the Germs!

The following simple recommendations should be practiced by everyone at all times in order to protect you, your family and the community from any type of illness.

- ◆ **Avoid close contact.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- ◆ **Stay home when you are sick.** If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.
- ◆ **Cover your mouth and nose.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- ◆ **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands often will help protect you (and others) from germs.
- ◆ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.



### **What is the bird flu (avian influenza)?**

The bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) virus. These flu virus occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the virus in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from it. However, avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them.

### **How does the bird flu virus differ from seasonal flu viruses that infect humans?**

Of the few bird flu viruses that have crossed the species barrier to infect humans, the most recent virus that you are hearing about in the news has caused the largest number of reported cases of severe disease and death in humans. In Asia, more than half of the people infected with the virus have died. Most cases have occurred in previously healthy children and young adults. However, it is possible that the only cases currently

being reported are those in the most severely ill people and that the full range of illness caused by the current bird flu virus has not yet been defined.

Unlike seasonal influenza, in which infection usually causes only mild respiratory symptoms in most people, bird flu infection may follow an unusually aggressive clinical course, with rapid deterioration and high fatality.

### **How does the bird flu spread among birds?**

Infected birds shed influenza virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or with surfaces that are contaminated with excretions or secretions. Domesticated birds may become infected with avian influenza virus through direct contact with infected waterfowl or other infected poultry or through contact with surfaces (such as dirt or cages) or materials (such as water or feed) that have been contaminated with the virus.

### **Do bird flu viruses infect humans?**

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but more than 100 confirmed cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997. The World Health Organization (WHO) provides updates which can be found at: [http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/).

### **What would make the bird flu a 'pandemic flu'?**

A 'pandemic flu' is defined as a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new virus appears in the human population and then spreads easily from person to person.

Three conditions must be met for a pandemic to start: 1) a new virus subtype must emerge; 2) it must infect humans and cause serious illness; and 3) it must spread easily and continue without interruption among humans. The current bird flu in Asia and Europe meets the first two conditions: it is a new virus for humans and it has infected more than 100 humans.

### **How do people become infected with bird flu viruses?**

Most cases of the bird flu infection in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry (e.g., domesticated chicken, ducks, and turkeys) or surfaces contaminated with secretions and excretions from infected birds. The spread of bird flu viruses from an ill person to another person has been reported very rarely, and transmission has not been observed to continue beyond one person. During an outbreak of bird flu among poultry, there is a possible risk to people who have direct or close contact with infected birds or with surfaces that have been contaminated with secretions and excretions from infected birds.

### **What are the symptoms of avian influenza in humans?**

Symptoms of the bird flu in humans have ranged from typical human flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress syndrome), and other severe and life-threatening complications. The symptoms of the bird flu may depend on type of virus causing the infection.

**How is avian influenza detected in humans?**

A laboratory test is needed to confirm bird flu in humans.

**How is avian influenza in humans treated?**

Studies done in laboratories suggest that the prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses should work in treating bird infection in humans. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work. Additional studies are needed to determine the effectiveness of these medicines.

**Does a seasonal flu vaccine protect me from avian influenza?**

No. Seasonal flu vaccines do not provide protection against the bird flu. However, it is always a good idea to obtain a vaccine for your well-being.

**Should I wear a surgical mask to prevent exposure to the bird flu?**

Currently, wearing a mask is not recommended for routine use (e.g., in public) for preventing flu virus exposure.

**Is there a risk for becoming infected with avian influenza by eating chicken, turkey, or duck?**

There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry or eggs can be a source of infection for bird flu viruses. For more information about bird flu and food safety issues, visit the WHO's website at: [www.who.org](http://www.who.org).

The U.S. government carefully controls domestic and imported food products, and in 2004 issued a ban on importation of poultry from countries affected by bird flu viruses. This ban still is in place. For more information, visit the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) website at: [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm).

**What can I do to help reduce the risk for infection from wild birds in the United States?**

As a general rule, the public should observe wildlife, including wild birds, from a distance. This protects you from possible exposure to pathogens and minimizes disturbance to the animal. Avoid touching wildlife. If there is contact with wildlife do not rub eyes, eat, drink, or smoke before washing hands with soap and water. Do not pick up diseased or dead wildlife. Contact the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for issues related to poultry flocks or the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for issues relating to wild birds.

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

There currently is no commercially available vaccine to protect humans against the bird flu virus that is currently being detected in Asia and Europe. However, vaccine development efforts are taking place. Research studies to test a vaccine that will protect humans against the current bird flu virus began in April 2005, and a series of clinical trials is under way. For more information about the avian influenza vaccine development process, visit the National Institute of Health's website: <http://www.nih.gov>.

**Does CDC recommend travel restrictions to areas with known bird flu outbreaks?**

CDC does not recommend any travel restrictions to affected countries at this time. However, CDC currently advises that travelers to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any

surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/).

**Is there a risk to importing pet birds that come from countries experiencing outbreaks of the bird flu ?**

The U.S. government has determined that there is a risk to importing pet birds from countries experiencing outbreaks of the avian influenza. CDC and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have both taken action to ban the importation of birds from areas where avian influenza has been documented.

**Can a person become infected with the bird flu virus by cleaning a bird feeder?**

There is no evidence of the avian influenza having caused disease in birds or people in the United States . At the present time, the risk of becoming infected with the virus from bird feeders is low. Generally, perching birds are the type of birds commonly at feeders. While there are documented cases of avian influenza causing death in such birds (e.g., house sparrow, Eurasian tree-sparrow, house finch), most of the wild birds that are traditionally associated with bird flu viruses are waterfowl and shore birds.

**I want to learn more about the avian influenza, where can I find additional information?**

There are numerous websites where you can obtain more information about the pandemic flu and/or the bird flu.

Direct links include:

- ◆ Centers for Disease Control: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- ◆ U.S. Federal Government: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)
- ◆ World Health Organization: [www.who.org](http://www.who.org)
- ◆ State of Florida, Department of Health: [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us)
- ◆ Department of Health and Human Services: [www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/](http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/)

*Portions of this flyer were adapted from [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/qa.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/qa.htm)*