



Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) **Commonly Asked Questions**

1. What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

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

2. Do bird flu viruses infect humans?

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

3. What are the symptoms of bird flu in humans?

Symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress), and other severe and life-threatening complications.

4. How does bird flu spread?

Infected birds shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions. It is believed that most cases of bird flu infection in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. The spread of avian influenza viruses from one ill person to another has been reported very rarely, and transmission has not been observed to continue beyond one person.

5. How is bird flu in humans treated?

Studies done in laboratories suggest that the prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses should work in preventing bird flu infection in humans. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work.

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

There currently is no commercially available vaccine to protect humans against bird flu.

7. Can I still eat poultry (chicken, duck, turkey)?

No human cases of bird flu have been linked to eating poultry, although in at least one instance, the bird flu virus was found in a package of frozen duck. Because heat destroys avian viruses, WHO (World Health Organization) officials don't consider cooked poultry a health threat. Even so, it's best to take precautions when handling and preparing poultry, which is often contaminated with salmonella or other harmful bacteria.

8. What can poultry producers do to prevent a bird flu outbreak on their farms?

Poultry producers should implement the following safety practices to prevent the introduction of avian flu into their flocks:

- Process each lot of birds separately, and clean and disinfect poultry houses between flocks.
- Protect poultry flocks from coming into contact with wild or migratory birds. Keep poultry away from any source of water that may have been contaminated by wild birds.
- Permit only essential workers and vehicles to enter the farm.
- Provide clean clothing and disinfection facilities for employees.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and vehicles (including tires and undercarriage) entering and leaving the farm.
- Do not loan to, or borrow equipment or vehicles from, other farms.
- Change footwear and clothing before working with your own flock after visiting another farm or live-bird market or avoid visiting another bird farm if possible.
- Do not bring birds from slaughter channels, especially those from live-bird markets, back to the farm.
- If bird flu is detected, farms must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. The virus is inactivated by heat and drying and it is also very sensitive to most disinfectants and detergents.

9. Does the bird flu currently exist in the United States? Has it ever occurred in this country?

Bird flu does not currently exist in the United States. There have been three outbreaks of the disease in poultry in this country--in 1924, 1983 and 2004.

What should travelers know about the bird flu?

If you're traveling to Southeast Asia or to any region with bird flu outbreaks, consider these public health recommendations:

Avoid domesticated birds. If possible, avoid rural areas, small farms and especially any close contact with domesticated fowl.

Avoid open-air markets. They're often breeding grounds for disease.

Wash your hands. One of the simplest ways to prevent infections of all kinds, hand washing is also one of the best. When you're traveling, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

Watch your kids. Keep a careful eye on young children, who are likely to put their hands in their mouths and who may not wash thoroughly.

Steer clear of raw eggs. Because eggshells are often contaminated with bird droppings, avoid any foods containing raw or undercooked eggs.

Ask about a flu shot. Before traveling, ask your doctor about a flu shot. It won't protect you from bird flu, but it may help reduce the risk of simultaneous infection with bird and human flu viruses.

10. How are domestic birds affected by bird flu?

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 virus.