



CALHOUN COUNTY
Public Health Department

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Fact Sheet

Avian Influenza

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza, or “bird flu”, is an infection caused by influenza A viruses that occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry these viruses in their intestines, but usually do not become sick from them. Avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds (including chickens, ducks, and turkeys) very sick and kill them.

There are many different subtypes of influenza A viruses. These subtypes differ because of changes in two different proteins on the surface of the influenza A virus.

The avian influenza virus is also known as HPAI H5N1.

How is avian influenza spread among birds?

Infected birds shed influenza virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with these contaminated secretions or excretions. Domesticated birds may become infected with influenza 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.

How do people become infected with avian influenza?

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but more than 190 confirmed cases of human infection with the avian influenza A (H5N1) virus have occurred since 1997 in Asia, parts of Europe, Near East, and Africa. Most cases of avian influenza in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry or surfaces contaminated with secretions or excretions from infected birds. Infected birds shed bird flu virus through their saliva, mucous and feces. Human infections with bird flu viruses can happen when the virus gets into a person’s eyes, nose or mouth, or is inhaled. This can happen when the virus is in the air (in droplets or possibly dust) and a person breathes it in, or possibly when a person touches something that has the virus on it and then touches their mouth, eyes, or nose. Human infections with bird flu viruses have occurred most often after unprotected contact with infected birds or surfaces contaminated with bird flu viruses.

The H5N1 virus does not infect humans easily, and if a person is infected, it is very difficult for the virus to spread to another person.

What are the symptoms of avian influenza in humans?

The reported signs and symptoms of bird flu virus infections in humans have ranged from no symptoms or mild illness [such as eye redness (conjunctivitis) or mild flu-like upper respiratory symptoms], to severe (such as pneumonia requiring hospitalization) and

included fever (temperature of 100°F [37.8°C] or greater) or feeling feverish*, cough, sore throat, runny or stuff nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Less common signs and symptoms include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, or seizures.

*Fever may not always be present

What are the consequences of avian influenza on human health?

Two main risks for human health from avian influenza are:

- 1) the risk of direct infection when the virus passes from the infected bird to humans, possibly resulting in severe disease; and
- 2) the risk that the virus, if given enough opportunities, will change into a form that is highly infectious for humans and spreads easily from person to person. Because these avian influenza viruses do not commonly infect humans, there is little or no immune protection against them in the human population. If the virus was able to spread easily from person to person, an influenza pandemic (worldwide outbreak of disease) could begin. No one can predict when a pandemic might occur. Experts from around the world are watching the current situation in Asia, parts of Europe, Near East, and Africa very closely and preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily from person to person.

What is the treatment for avian influenza in humans?

Laboratory studies have shown that some of the prescription medicines approved in the United States for human influenza viruses should work in treating avian influenza. However, influenza viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work. CDC regularly tests bird flu viruses for antiviral resistance.

Does the current seasonal influenza vaccine protect from avian influenza?

It is especially important that people who may have exposure to sick birds get a seasonal flu vaccine, ideally 2 weeks before their potential exposure, if possible. The seasonal flu vaccination will not prevent infection with bird flu viruses, but can reduce the risk of getting sick with human and bird flu viruses at the same time.

Is there a risk for becoming infected with avian influenza by eating poultry?

There is no evidence that properly handled and cooked poultry or eggs can be a source of infection for avian influenza viruses. It is important to always follow good hygienic practices and proper cooking for poultry and poultry products.

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other foods.
- After cutting raw meats, wash cutting board, knife, and countertops with hot, soapy water.
- Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure that food has reached a safe internal temperature. For poultry, the recommendation is 165° to kill foodborne germs that may be present.

We have a small flock of chickens. Is it safe to keep them?

Yes. In the United States, there is no need at present to remove a flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian influenza. The U.S. Department of Agriculture monitors potential infection of poultry and poultry products by avian influenza viruses and other infectious disease agents.

What precautions can be taken to reduce the risk for infection from wild birds in the United States?

As a general rule, the public should observe wildlife from a distance. This protects from possible exposure to pathogens and minimizes disturbance to the animal. If there is contact with wildlife, do not rub eyes, eat, drink, or smoke before washing hands thoroughly with soap and water. Do not pick up dead or diseased wildlife.

What other animals can be infected with avian influenza?

Influenza A viruses are endemic (can infect and regularly transmit) in 6 animal species or groups (wild waterfowl, domestic poultry, swine, horses, dogs, and bats) in addition to humans.

How do cats become infected with avian influenza?

Cats can be infected with influenza viruses, including avian influenza viruses, and can spread influenza viruses to each other (cat-to-cat). Influenza in cats is thought to spread the same way that human flu spreads: through direct contact (playing or sleeping together, licking, nuzzling); through the air (droplets made from coughing or sneezing, including nasal discharge); and via contaminated surfaces (such as shared food and water bowls, cage surfaces).

Can cats spread avian influenza to humans?

CDC believes that the risk of human infection with an influenza virus from an infected cat is low, but the risk is probably dependent on the characteristics of the virus in question and the duration and intensity of exposure.

What should I do if I see a dead bird?

Call the Calhoun County Public Health Department, Environmental Health Division to report a dead bird at 269-969-6341. Avoid bare hand contact with dead birds. Do not handle dead birds without gloves or a plastic bag.

How do I get more information on avian influenza?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>

Spanish: <https://espanol.cdc.gov/enes/flu/avianflu/>

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