

# H5N1 Avian Influenza Facts

## For More Information:

### **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Toll-Free:**

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

1-888-232-6348 TTY

E-mail: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

Clinician Info:  
1-877-554-4625

You can also visit the following Web sites for the latest travel advisories and updated information on avian influenza:

### **Oregon Department of Human Services:**

<http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/spotlight/panflu/index.shtml>

### **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:**

[www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm)

### **World Health Organization:**

[www.who.int/foodsafety/micro/avian/en/](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/micro/avian/en/)

## Introduction

- There are many different strains of avian influenza, or “bird flu” that occur naturally in wild birds. There are a few strains known to cause severe illness in birds.
- When domesticated poultry such as chickens and turkeys are infected with these strains they become very sick and many die.
- There is currently a strain of avian influenza called H5N1 that causes severe disease in domesticated poultry. Since 1997 the H5N1 virus has caused outbreaks of disease in poultry throughout SE Asia, Africa and Europe. Millions of birds have died or have been culled due to the disease.
- Some strains of avian influenza are known to cause illness in people. To date, human infection with avian influenza has not been common. Depending upon the strain of virus, human disease can range from very mild to severe respiratory disease and death.
- Since December 2003 there have been more than 200 reported human cases of H5N1 avian influenza and more than 100 deaths. All human cases have occurred in people who had close contact with infected poultry.
- To date, there have been no reports of this strain of H5N1 avian influenza in birds or humans in North America.

## Risks to Humans

- The people in who have become sick with H5N1 avian influenza have been those with close contact with infected poultry. Spread of the virus from person to person has been rare.
- Current concerns about avian influenza are frequently linked with pandemic influenza. Pandemic influenza is any form of influenza virus that causes a global outbreak of disease. If avian influenza were to develop the ability to spread easily from person to person, it would have the potential to cause a pandemic. It is not known whether this will happen.
- The current risk to Americans from the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak is low. This strain of the virus has not been found in the United States. There have been no human cases of H5N1 avian influenza in the United States. However, it is possible that travelers to affected countries could become infected.

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## **Symptoms**

- The symptoms of avian influenza in people range from typical flu-like symptoms (such as fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches), to eye infections, pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, diarrhea, brain disease and other severe and life-threatening complications.

## **Protecting Yourself from Avian Influenza**

- When planning an international trip, check the CDC Web site or call their public information hotline at 1-888-246-2675 for the latest travel advice.
- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) currently advises travelers to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza to avoid poultry farms and bird markets where live poultry are raised or kept. Avoid any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with poultry feces or secretions.
- Wash your hands frequently. Use waterless alcohol-based hand gels when soap and water are not available and when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Influenza virus is destroyed by heat. Thoroughly cook all foods, including poultry, eggs and poultry blood.
- After return from travel, monitor your health for 10 days.
- If you become ill with fever and develop a cough or difficulty breathing during this 10-day period, be sure to tell your healthcare provider about your travel and whether you visited poultry farms or came into close contact with someone who had been diagnosed with avian influenza, or with animals in live bird markets, or any surfaces that appeared to be contaminated with droppings from poultry or other animals.
- If you are not feeling well, wash your hands frequently and cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Avoid touching or kissing friends and family members, avoid public gatherings, and stay a safe distance (more than three feet) away from other people to avoid spreading your illness.
- The spread of avian influenza is not limited to any one geographic area, nor is it linked to a particular ethnic group. Any individual, regardless of their cultural identity or background can get the flu.

## **Treatment**

- Antiviral drugs and supportive care have been used to treat patients in developing countries where the rare human cases have occurred, but the death rate is still high. The quality of healthcare available in the US could potentially save more lives.
- There currently is no vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 avian influenza virus that is being seen in other parts of the world. However, vaccine development efforts are underway.