

Avian Flu

What is Avian Flu?

Avian flu, also known as bird flu, is a disease of chickens, ducks, geese, and other birds. There are a variety of avian flu viruses, but only one, called H5N1, is a significant risk to humans. Avian flu is very contagious among birds and can be deadly to birds, people, and cats. While most avian flu viruses do not usually infect people, the H5N1 virus has been causing human infections since 1997.

How do people get Avian Flu?

Infected birds shed the virus in saliva and droppings. People get infected by coming in contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces. It does not appear that avian flu spreads easily from person to person. The virus is not passed through eating cooked meat or eggs, so there is no danger in eating fully cooked chicken or duck.

At this time, there have been no human cases of avian flu diagnosed in the United States. It is possible that travelers returning from affected countries in Asia have been infected, but medical and public health officials have been watching closely since February of 2004 for any such cases.

What are the symptoms of Avian Flu in people?

People infected with avian flu have symptoms similar to regular flu: fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches; they can also have shortness of breath and/or eye infections. Severe cases of avian flu can cause serious breathing problems including pneumonia and can cause death. It can take up to 10 days for symptoms to appear after exposure.

What is the treatment for Avian Flu?

Health care providers will tell patients how to treat, depending on their symptoms. Depending on the severity of the symptoms, treatment may include hospitalization, supportive care and/or the use of anti-viral drugs.

Is there a vaccine for people against Avian Flu?

No, a vaccine that protects from avian flu is not available at this time; however, vaccine development efforts are underway.

Why does the news media talk about the dangers of getting avian flu and human flu at the same time?

The mixing of human and avian viruses could produce a new kind of flu to which humans have no protection. It is also possible that the new type of flu would be easily passed from person-to-person, which could cause widespread outbreak (pandemic), resulting in millions of illnesses and large numbers of deaths.

How can Avian Flu be prevented?

Even though there is no conclusive evidence that avian flu is transmitted person-to-person, health officials recommend that people take the same precautions to protect themselves against avian flu as they would colds and other flu. Wash your hands frequently and stay away from people who have flu-like symptoms and have recently traveled to an Asian country.

If traveling in an affected country, avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surface that appears to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. When planning an international trip, check the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site or call their public information hotline at 1-888-246-2675 for the latest travel advice.

If you have recently traveled to a country where bird flu has been reported and are becoming ill with typical flu symptoms, be sure to tell your healthcare provider about your travel and whether you:

- visited poultry farms
- came into close contact with someone who had been diagnosed with bird flu
- came into close contact with animals in live food markets
- came into close contact with any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with droppings from poultry or other animals.

For more information, visit the CDC website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>