

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

Information Sheet for General Public

What is Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)?

Avian influenza or “bird flu” refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) type A viruses. Although it spreads naturally among wild water birds, these viruses can infect domestic poultry, other birds, and other animal species. In the United States, the avian influenza virus circulating globally, avian influenza A(H5N1), is responsible for causing outbreaks in domestic poultry and dairy cows. While bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, sporadic human infections have occurred.

What are the symptoms of Bird Flu?

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Fever or feeling feverish
- Eye redness (conjunctivitis)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Seizures

Human illnesses caused by avian influenza range in severity from asymptomatic infections (no symptoms) to severe illness leading to death.

How does Bird Flu spread?

Bird flu infects the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts in wild and domestic birds and is present in the saliva, mucus, and feces of infected birds. Mammals can be infected with H5N1 bird flu viruses when they eat infected birds or other animals; or if they are exposed to environments contaminated with the virus. Recently, spread of avian influenza A(H5N1) has happened between cows in the same herd, from cows to poultry, and between herds of dairy cows. Humans may be infected if the bird flu virus gets into a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. People with close or prolonged unprotected contact with infected birds or animals are at greater risk of infection.

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Who is at risk of getting Bird Flu?

While anyone who has close unprotected contact with infected birds or animals may be at risk of catching the bird flu, people who regularly work around avian influenza A(H5N1) infected animals are more likely to be infected. People who are at greater risk may include:

- Poultry farm, hatchery, and processing plant workers
- Backyard or hobbyist flock owners
- Wildlife biologists
- Animal control and welfare workers who handle infected or wild birds
- Dairy cattle farmers or slaughterhouse workers performing certain tasks
- Veterinarians or veterinary staff
- Disease control workers including federal and state agricultural agency workers
- Hunters

Can Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) be prevented?

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against flu viruses that normally infect people; it does not protect against bird flu. For most people, the best way to prevent bird flu is by avoiding sources of exposure. This means avoiding direct contact with wild birds, unprotected contact with domestic poultry or dairy cattle that are sick or have died, and avoiding contact with animal products or environments that are contaminated with the bird flu virus like, saliva, mucous, or feces of infected birds and raw milk from infected dairy cows.

Information for people with job-related contact with wild or domestic birds

People who have job-related contact with birds or dairy cattle can take steps to reduce the risk of exposure and stay healthy. If you have job-related exposure to birds or cattle refer to your Safety Officer for appropriate use of PPE and personal hygiene practices while at work. People with job-related exposures should adhere to the protocols, training, and guidance given by their site Safety Officer. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed guidance specifically for the protection of people who may be at increased risk of exposure to bird flu viruses.

Information for other groups who may have contact with wild or domestic birds

There are precautions that backyard and hobbyist flock owners should take to minimize their risk for bird flu infection. If you suspect that your flock is infected with the bird flu virus, immediately report it to the state veterinarian or call United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s toll-free number 1 (866) 536-7593. Flock owners should wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

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when handling sick or dead birds or environments that could be contaminated with the saliva, feces, or body fluids of infected birds. PPE should continue to be worn in contaminated areas until all infected birds, eggs, feces, or contaminated litter have been removed from the area. Recommended PPE includes safety goggles, disposable gloves, rubber boots or boot covers, an N95 respirator or well-fitting facemask, disposable fluid-resistant coveralls, and a disposable head or hair cover. While the area is being cleaned and disinfected, avoid stirring up dust, bird waste, and feathers to prevent dispersing the virus into the air. Hunters should dress game birds in the field and wear recommended PPE (i.e., gloves, an N95 respirator or well-fitting facemask, and eye protection) and wash their hands with soap and water after dressing game birds.

Who should receive the seasonal influenza vaccine?

A vaccine to protect against the bird flu is not currently available. The CDC recommends that everyone six months and older receives a seasonal flu vaccine every year. 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. People who may have work related contact with sick birds or cattle should receive the seasonal flu vaccine at least two weeks before any potential exposure, if possible.

What should you do if you are exposed to Bird Flu?

If you have been around birds or cattle that were infected with the bird flu virus, the local health department will monitor your health for the 10 days after your exposure. If you develop symptoms at any point during the 10 days after your last exposure, contact the local health department, stay home, and avoid being in close contact with other people. If you become very ill and need immediate medical attention, seek emergency care. Call the hospital ahead of time so that the hospital's medical staff are prepared to provide your care.

How is Bird Flu diagnosed?

If you have symptoms, you may be asked to test for bird flu virus infection. The local health department will coordinate testing for you through the state public health lab if you get sick after being around sick birds or cattle. Testing at the state laboratory is free of charge.

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How is Bird Flu treated?

If you have symptoms of bird flu virus, a healthcare provider should prescribe you antiviral medication, it is important that you take the medication as prescribed.

For more information about avian influenza visit the CDC website at:

www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/

For more information about worker protection visit the CDC website at:

www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h5/worker-protection-ppe.htm