

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

What is Avian Influenza (or the Bird Flu)?

Avian influenza is a type of influenza virus found in birds. There are many different strains of avian influenza and very few infect humans. The H5N1 strain first appeared in humans in Southeast Asia in 1997.

Can people get avian influenza?

Generally, humans do not become infected with avian influenzas. However, like all influenza viruses, avian influenzas can change or mutate over time. In Southeast Asia, the H5N1 avian influenza has changed and some people have become infected with the virus through contact with infected birds. The areas where health officials have found avian influenza in humans include Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam. There have been no human cases reported in the United States.

How is avian influenza transmitted?

Some birds can carry the virus in saliva and nasal fluids and in their feces. People may get the virus from contact with infected live birds, infected dead birds and/or their feces. This includes contact with cooking surfaces that are contaminated with poultry feces or secretions. The spread of avian influenza viruses from one ill person to another has been reported very rarely, and has been limited, inefficient and unsustainable. If the virus changes again so that it is more easily spread person-to-person, then many people could become ill.

Symptoms

Birds: Some infected birds can carry the virus without showing any symptoms, while others may become very ill or die. No cases of H5N1 in birds have been reported in the United States.

Humans: Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and, sometimes, eye infections. Some people may have trouble breathing, which can develop into serious problems, like pneumonia.

Prevention and Treatment

- Travelers should stay away from poultry (chicken, duck, goose, and turkey) farms and markets where live animals are sold, and make sure that all foods containing poultry products, including eggs and blood are thoroughly cooked
- There is currently no human vaccination for avian influenza.
- Regular influenza shots are a good idea for high risk individuals. Although influenza shots will not prevent avian influenza, they may decrease the severity of illness.
- There is medication to help persons infected with avian influenza. Individuals who are ill should seek medical attention from their physician.
- Frequent handwashing is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of influenza.
- If you are ill, stay home from work or school.

For more information, contact:

- Colorado HELP hotline: 1-877-462-2911
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/influenza



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