
Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the current avian influenza situation?

At this time avian influenza (H5N1), also known as bird flu, is a disease of wild birds and domesticated poultry like farm chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Although millions of birds have been infected, only a very small number of people have been infected (see www.sfdph.org/cdcp for exact numbers). Because all influenza viruses have the ability to change there is concern that the H5N1 virus could mutate and be spread easily and widely by humans. If that happens, it is possible that a pandemic or widespread outbreak of disease could occur. World health organizations and the San Francisco Department of Public Health are monitoring the situation and making plans to control avian influenza.

What is the difference between avian influenza and pandemic influenza?

A pandemic influenza occurs when a new influenza virus: 1) develops and there is little or no immunity (protection due to previous infection or vaccination) in the human population; 2) it is easily passed from human to human; 3) is found in many countries; and, 4) causes serious illness in humans. Presently avian influenza (H5N1) is not a pandemic influenza because it is mostly a disease of birds and is not easily passed between humans.

Is there avian influenza in the U.S. now?

No. Avian influenza has not been found in wild birds, domestic poultry, or humans in the United States.

How can a person get avian influenza?

Avian influenza is not easily passed from birds to humans. People may get avian influenza by touching an infected bird, fluid or surfaces contaminated with fluids from infected birds and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. People who could be at risk in the US are those who travel to countries with outbreaks of avian influenza and have close contact with live or improperly cooked poultry while there.

Can I get avian influenza from eating chicken or other poultry?

Thoroughly cooked poultry cannot infect someone with the virus. Avoid eating uncooked pink chicken or runny yolks. The U.S. does not import poultry except for a small amount from Canada. When cooking it's always good practice to wash your hands, surfaces, and cutlery after handling raw poultry products, including eggs to kill germs.

What can I do to prevent catching avian influenza?

When traveling to areas reporting avian flu outbreaks avoid direct contact with poultry, wild birds, farms, and live-animal markets. Avoid touching surfaces contaminated with poultry feces (droppings) or secretions and only eat well-cooked poultry. Wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

What are the symptoms?

Individuals with avian influenza (H5N1) usually develop symptoms within 10 days of contact with infected birds, became very ill, and required hospitalization. Symptoms are usually severe and include high fever, muscle aches, cough, mucus production and shortness of breath. Abdominal pain and diarrhea can also occur.

Is it safe to travel to countries where avian influenza has been detected?

Yes. Follow the safety measures above. If you have contact with birds and develop symptoms within 10 days of close contact, call your doctor and let him/her know about your travels and contact with birds.

**CHECK FOR UPDATED
AVIAN INFLUENZA INFORMATION**

www.sfdph.org/cdcp

&

**Avian Influenza Information Line
(415) 554-2905**

Is there an avian influenza vaccine?

No. A vaccine for humans is being developed. It is expected that if avian influenza becomes easily passed between humans a vaccine could be available within 4-6 months. There is now a vaccine for birds which is being used on domestic poultry in areas that have infected birds.

Is there a treatment?

No. There is no known treatment right now. Research is being done to identify the effectiveness of medications like oseltamavir (Tamiflu) and zanamavir (Relenza). If an outbreak occurs in our region, treatment recommendations will be made based on the most current information. Local and national stockpiles will be used to get the right medications, as available, to infected people and their close contacts.

Should I avoid chickens and other birds in San Francisco?

No. Birds are not a risk to people in San Francisco at this time. There is no avian influenza in chicken flocks, other domesticated birds, and wild birds in the U.S. If avian influenza is found in the U.S. additional guidance will be posted.

What should I do if I see a dead bird?

Avoid touching dead birds with your bare hands. Use gloves or an inverted plastic bag to place the dead bird in a garbage bag. Throw it away with your regular garbage. (To report a dead bird for West Nile Virus testing in California call: 1-877-WNV-Bird).

What is San Francisco doing to prepare for avian influenza?

The San Francisco Department of Public Health has created an Avian/Pandemic Flu Task Force for all city agencies. This group works to ensure that all city departments and agencies have well-developed and coordinated plans to address a pandemic influenza situation. We are working to ensure that our hospitals and clinicians are educated about pandemic flu and know how to care for infected patients. We also provide information on our website www.sfdph.org/cdcp and our avian influenza information line (415) 554-2905.

Will there be a quarantine if avian influenza is found in San Francisco?

Maybe. A quarantine is when people who may have been exposed and infected are asked to limit their activities to reduce the possible spread of infection. A quarantine is just one of many tools for stopping the spread of an infectious disease. If a quarantine is implemented the health department will likely request voluntary compliance of "home" quarantine.

This fact sheet will be updated as the situation changes and additional information is available.

Updated March 20, 2006