

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BIRD FLU



1. What is bird flu? How does it spread?

Bird flu is primarily a disease of birds that live and feed in water, particularly ducks, geese, and swans. Scientists have named this virus “H5N1 influenza.” Bird flu is also known as avian influenza (AI).

This flu virus is highly contagious and has killed many kinds of wild birds. Birds generally catch bird flu by coming into contact with infected birds or their feces (droppings), or from water or soil where infected birds have defecated. Bird flu spreads very quickly among domestic poultry (such as chickens). It rapidly kills most chickens that become infected, usually within two days.

2. How is it moving from Asia to Africa?

Wild birds from Asia can mix with birds from other areas during their seasonal migrations. Some of the migrating birds are carriers of the virus, although they may not show any signs of the disease. Other wild birds and healthy fowl, such as domestic chickens, turkey, guinea fowl, and ducks, can be infected when they mix with infected wild birds, come in contact with their feces, or swim and search for food in water that has been contaminated by their feces.

3. Where are the poultry outbreaks happening?

From mid-December 2003 through 2005, bird flu outbreaks in poultry have been reported in the following Asian countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, China (PRC), Hong Kong (SARPRC), Thailand, Laos, Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

In addition, during 2005, bird flu has been found in wild birds with with more limited domestic poultry outbreaks in Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Turkey." The first case in Africa was identified in northern Nigeria in February 2006.

About 150 million birds have died from this disease or been destroyed as a preventive measure in these countries. When bird flu spreads from wild birds to domestic poultry, or among domestic poultry, all surrounding poultry must be "culled" or destroyed to prevent the disease from spreading.

4. Have any humans been infected by bird flu so far?

From 2003 to the end of 2005, there have been 135 reported cases of humans infected by the virus, and 69 of the infected people in Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, China, and Indonesia have died. It is not possible to know exactly how many people have been infected with bird flu so far, because infections may not always be reported. In 2006, additional human cases have been found in Turkey and Iraq.

5. How do people become infected?

Currently, humans cannot get infected easily with bird flu. Even though millions of birds have been infected with this disease in Asia, only 135 cases of bird flu in humans have been detected so far.

The few people who have been infected with bird flu generally have handled dead or sick birds or have come in contact with bird feces (droppings) or blood of sick birds. It is believed that people are most likely to be infected when they kill, pluck, clean, or prepare infected birds for cooking. Infected bird feces (droppings) or blood can contaminate cages, hen houses, clothing, wheeled chicken carriers, or vehicles. It is possible for people to get infected with the disease if they handle these contaminated items.

6. Does this virus pass easily from birds to humans?

No. The bird flu virus is not easily transmitted from birds to humans, especially if basic hygiene practices are followed (see chart below). Only 135 human cases have been reported so far, although there have been hundreds of domestic poultry outbreaks in the past two years.

7. Can infected humans pass the virus to other people?

As of December 2005, there was no good evidence of infected humans passing the H5N1 virus to other people. However, this may happen. In the past, a different bird flu virus (H1N1) did evolve so that it was easily passed from human to human. It caused a worldwide epidemic in 1918. Today, scientists are watching closely so that they will know as soon as possible if the H5N1 virus changes so that it can be passed more easily from person to person.

8. What are our health implications if we are infected by bird flu?

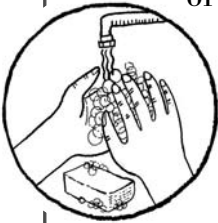
When the virus directly infects humans from poultry, it can result in a very severe disease. The affected person/s may suffer from viral pneumonia and multi-organ failure (kidney, lungs, etc.). The risk of dying is very high (currently about 50 percent).

9. What can we do to stay safe from bird flu?

1. Do not touch a sick or dead bird.
 - When you see a sick or dead bird, report it to authorities (such as agriculture officers). The sick or dead bird should be burned or buried, not eaten.



2. Always wash hands vigorously by rubbing with soap and water after coming in contact with birds or places birds have been.



- Do the same after handling raw poultry for cooking or any other purpose.
- Wash hands frequently to protect yourself not only from bird flu but from other diseases as well.

3. Avoid markets where poultry is sold if you hear of an outbreak of bird flu nearby.

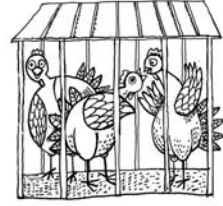
4. Cook chicken meat and eggs thoroughly (no pink meat or runny yolks).

5. If bird flu is suspected due to a large number of chickens dying, or if it is confirmed in an outbreak, try to avoid all surfaces that may have been contaminated until they have been cleaned and disinfected (e.g., by two quicklime treatments one week apart), and at least three weeks have passed since birds came in contact with them.



WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROTECT OUR FLOCKS FROM BIRD FLU?

1. Do not allow domestic birds to have any contact with wild birds
2. Keep any new birds separate from the rest of the flock for at least two weeks.



3. If advised by local authorities, vaccinate your poultry. (Ask the agriculture officer if a vaccine is available.)

10. How does bird flu affect us?

Why is it important for us to do something?

For many families in Africa, backyard poultry is a source of food, especially protein, and some income. Bird flu kills poultry and spreads very quickly. It can kill all of your chickens within two days. In many countries in Asia, when the disease was found in domestic poultry, it was necessary to kill surrounding flocks of birds, even healthy birds, to stop the spread of the virus.

11. How do I know if my chickens have bird flu?

The symptoms of Newcastle disease and other bird diseases are very similar to bird flu, so you will not always know at first. As bird flu is highly contagious and lethal, it quickly infects and kills more birds than any other common bird diseases. That's why you must report quickly to the authorities (as mentioned in the chart above) if you see birds showing signs of sickness.

12. Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?

Heat from cooking (at or above 70 degrees centigrade) kills the bird flu virus. Well-cooked chicken and eggs cannot spread bird flu.

MOST IMPORTANT
INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES
TO BIRD FLU

1. Avoid sick or dead birds.
2. Report sick or dead birds to authorities.
3. Wash hands frequently by rubbing vigorously with soap and water.
4. Separate domestic poultry from wild birds.
5. Discuss these recommendations with your friends, family, and community.

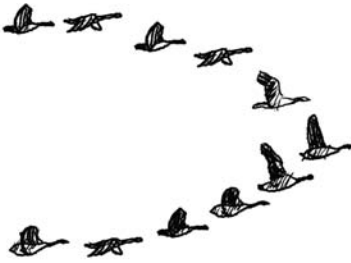
MOST IMPORTANT
COMMUNITY RESPONSES
TO BIRD FLU

- B: be alert
- I: inform others
- R: respond quickly
- D: develop action plans (for prevention)

- F: follow safety rules and correct hygiene practices
- L: leverage community support
- U: use local resources

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