



ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT AVIAN FLU OF SPECIFIC INTEREST TO US SERVICEMEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Last updated Nov. 1, 2005

What is the role of DoD in dealing with avian flu?

The Department of Defense is working with our international partners to track and combat the spread of avian flu in areas where it is currently found. Our plan for responding to avian flu includes efforts to preserve combat capabilities and readiness, save lives, and reduce human suffering for all service members and their families in the face of a pandemic of influenza. In addition, DoD is currently engaged with other U.S. Government agencies – including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Agriculture, USAID and the Department of State – to ensure an effective and coordinated approach to this potential public health and economic threat both domestically and abroad.

As a servicemember, will I be involved in dealing with the avian flu, either domestically or abroad?

At this time it is unknown what an individual service member's involvement in dealing with avian flu would be. Depending on our requirements to defend the nation against aggressors, service members may be required to assist in either domestic or international efforts to control the disease. Service members will be given instructions regarding personal measures they can take to limit the spread of the disease should it occur.

Are servicemembers overseas at risk of catching avian flu?

Most cases of avian flu in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. Service members in areas with identified cases of avian flu are encouraged to take appropriate precautions when dealing with poultry, agricultural areas, and situations that may include contaminated materials.

Servicemembers and their families are advised to avoid contact with birds and poultry, and avoid going to bird parks, poultry markets and farms. Avoid touching birds and poultry, especially their droppings, which may carry the avian flu virus. If servicemembers or family members have been in contact with birds or poultry, they should immediately wash their hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water. Individuals should observe food hygiene when handling, cooking and eating poultry in these affected areas and eat only poultry and eggs that have been thoroughly cooked and from approved sources.

What can I do to protect myself from the avian flu?

Travelers to affected areas are advised to avoid contact with birds and poultry, and avoid going to bird parks, poultry markets and farms. Avoid touching birds and poultry, especially their droppings, which may carry the avian flu virus. If you have been in contact with birds or poultry, immediately wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water. Observe food hygiene and eat only poultry and eggs that have been thoroughly cooked and from approved sources.

Servicemembers are reminded that while the seasonal vaccine they are required to receive annually does not protect against avian flu, getting vaccinated against seasonal flu is an important part of maintaining good body resistance. DoD requires all active duty personnel to get vaccinated against influenza and encourages all military beneficiaries to get vaccinated against influenza.



Finally, the best protection against all strains of influenza is building and maintaining good body resistance. This can be achieved through a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, good personal hygiene, adequate indoor ventilation and not smoking. As with any disease spread from a respiratory route, wash your hands, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and Avoid crowded places with poor ventilation.

Could our enemies use this flu as a weapon?

Many strains of influenza have significant potential for bioterrorism. It is possible for any flu virus to be weaponized and utilized by terrorists, with those that can be spread by human-to-human contact being the most dangerous and concerning to officials. Grants from groups including the U.S. Army Disaster Relief and Emergency Medical Services (DREAMS) have funded studies of this potential threat.

Are there travel restrictions due to the avian flu?

No travel restrictions currently exist related to avian flu. At this time, U.S. government agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of State have not issued any travel alerts or advisories for avian flu-infected areas. However, surveillance is ongoing in these areas and travelers to these areas are encouraged to check for travel alerts that may be issued for affected areas from these agencies.

How should servicemembers in high-risk countries protect themselves from avian flu?

We advise servicemembers in countries in PACOM and CENT with known outbreaks of avian influenza avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises individuals clean their hands often with soap and water or waterless alcohol-based hand-rubs to help prevent disease transmission. In addition, as a precaution, all foods from poultry, including eggs, should be thoroughly cooked.

Where can I find more information and the most recent alerts about the avian flu?

The majority of information is available on websites from a number of different organizations. DoD information will be updated as needed and available at www.deploymentlink.osd.mil. In addition, service members with concerns about avian influenza can call toll-free at (800) 497-6261.