



PANDEMIC FLU AND AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE

We are in the midst of flu season and it is important that we are knowledgeable regarding influenza and maintain awareness regarding our health and the health of those we care about. Over the past year, there have been many reports on pandemic flu and avian influenza A (H5N1) virus or “bird flu”.

➤ What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu occurs when there is a new strain of influenza virus that causes high numbers of severe illnesses and passes easily from person to person. Because there is no natural immunity, the disease spreads rapidly throughout the world.

➤ What is avian influenza A (H5N1) virus?

Avian influenza A (H5N1) virus, commonly known as “bird flu”, is a strain of influenza that has caused illness and death among poultry worldwide. Bird flu has been passed to humans who have had contact with infected poultry. To date, over 250 people worldwide have been infected with bird flu. One hundred fifty-one of these people have died. The current strain of bird flu is not easily passed from human to human; therefore it is not presently categorized as pandemic flu.

➤ What are the symptoms of avian influenza A (H5N1) virus or “bird flu”?

- Typical human influenza-like symptoms: Fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches
- Pneumonia
- Severe respiratory disease
- Other life-threatening conditions

Symptoms of avian influenza may depend on which specific virus subtype and strain caused the infection. Avian influenza can only be diagnosed by laboratory testing.

A type of influenza that is more familiar to most people is the **seasonal or common flu**. The common flu can be transmitted from person to person. Most people have immunity and vaccinations are available for the most common strains each year. Getting vaccinated each year is the best way to prevent the flu.

The following are some health habits you can adopt in order to further help prevent the flu.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Also, if you are sick, stay at home in order to prevent others from getting sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. It is best to sneeze or cough into your sleeve rather than into your hands. Refer to: www.coughsafe.com/media.html
- Wash your hands often to help protect yourself and others from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Viruses are more easily spread through these routes.
- Stay Healthy. Stay well rested, engage in regular physical activity, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- In addition, please be sure to also teach children good flu prevention habits: Cover their nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, wash their hands with soap and water, and remind them not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth.

By taking a few simple precautions and remaining knowledgeable, it is possible to protect yourself and the ones you love from getting infected with the flu this season.

References: www.pandemicflu.gov , www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm