



Protect Yourself Avian Flu Laboratory Employees

Avian flu is a viral disease and it can be very contagious and even deadly in poultry (e.g., chickens). Of great concern are the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 viruses that have killed millions of birds and infected humans in other countries. If these viruses are found in the U.S., take appropriate precautions

Avian Flu Symptoms in Humans

Range from fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches; to diarrhea, eye infections, pneumonia and severe respiratory diseases. The symptoms of avian influenza may depend on which virus caused the infection but are often similar to those associated with human seasonal influenza.

Precautions for Lab Employees

HPAI H5N1 is classified as a select agent and must be worked with under Biosafety Level (BSL) 3 with enhancements. These conditions include BSL 3 procedures plus the following:

- controlled access, double-door entry with change room and shower;
- use of showers by personnel before exiting;
- decontamination of all wastes; and
- use at least an N-95 respirator.

Key Considerations

- Virus culture studies on respiratory specimens from patients suspected of having HPAI H5N1 infections should NOT be attempted except under stringent BSL 3 conditions with enhancements.
- If a clinical laboratory does not have appropriate facilities (BSL 3 laboratories with enhancements), virus isolations should not be ordered for patients suspected of having HPAI H5N1 infection.
- Molecular assays (e.g., RT-PCR) or commercial antigen detection testing can be conducted on clinical specimens from suspect HPAI H5N1 cases using standard BSL 2 work practices.

Additional Guidance

- Get the seasonal flu vaccine.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms, stay at home except to get medical attention.

For more complete information:

 Occupational
Safety and Health
Administration
U.S. Department of Labor
www.osha.gov (800) 321-OSHA

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