

AVIAN (“BIRD”) FLU

- Avian flu is a disease caused by influenza viruses that primarily infect birds but may also infect other animals, including humans.
- The outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza A (H5N1) in animals in Asia, Europe, the Near East, and Africa is not expected to diminish soon. Infections among domestic poultry have become common in some areas, and direct contact with infected poultry or wild birds will continue to cause human infections.
- Flu viruses mutate frequently and can infect other animals and humans. So far, the spread of H5N1 virus from person-to-person has been very rare, limited, and unsustainable.
- Still, the possibility of mutation to permit easy human-to-human transmission continues to pose an important public health threat, in part because reliable vaccines cannot be made in advance.



Transmission and Symptoms

	Seasonal Flu	Avian Flu
Transmission	Spread through droplets expelled during coughing and sneezing.	Spread through contact with infected birds, their droppings or blood, or surfaces exposed to them. However, avian flu could mutate to spread from person to person.
Symptoms	High fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches, nausea (which may lead to vomiting and diarrhea)	Similar to those of seasonal flu but may include abdominal pain, chest pain, eye infections, and severe respiratory diseases.
Who Is at Risk	Those 65 years or older, those who live in long-term care facilities or need regular medical attention, those prone to asthma or other respiratory conditions, and young children (6–23 months)	People of all ages are at risk. Past influenza epidemics suggest that healthy young adults, including pregnant women, may be most at risk of <i>exposure</i> .
	NOTE: Because their responsibilities may bring them into contact with infected birds or their droppings or with infected people, Coast Guard personnel who are in the Aids to Navigation community, boarding teams, the Deployable Operations Group, and the health-care community are at increased risk for avian flu.	

Current Situation for Travelers and Those Living Abroad

- Up-to-date avian flu information for travelers is available at the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention “Travelers’ Health” website at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentAvianFluAsia.aspx.
- Personnel deployed abroad should stay current with “Guidelines and Recommendations—Interim Guidance about Avian Influenza A (H5N1) for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad” at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentAvianFluAmericansAbroad.aspx.

Vaccine and Treatment

- Vaccines can generally be produced only after a new strain of virus appears.
- **Currently, there is no vaccine commercially available for the H5N1 avian flu virus;** however, several are in various phases of testing.
- Antiviral medicines can treat some cases of avian flu.

Prevention

Flu viruses can be prevented by vaccines, antiviral medicines, and good hygiene.

- Get the flu shots that *are* available to boost immunity. Get vaccinated every year because the vaccine is changed along with the mutating flu virus to help fight the most threatening strain.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid contact with people who are ill.
- Teach your children flu prevention hygiene.
- Properly cook poultry to destroy all germs, including the avian flu virus.

Preparation

- Get an emergency supply kit or update your existing kit(s).
- Increase water, food, and medical stocks to two-week supplies.
- Add hand wash with 60%–95% alcohol content, a thermometer, medicines for fever and diarrhea, fluids with electrolytes, and facemasks.
- Make a family emergency plan, including a communication plan and care for extended family members.
- Communicate with superiors/supervisors regarding—
 - Evacuation
 - Continuity of operations
 - Leave policies
 - Possibility of working at home during an epidemic
- Be aware of emergency, containment, or evacuation plans and distribution sites.
- Contact local officials and check health and government websites to stay informed, and plan as you would for any emergency.
- Consider helping members of your community who might need assistance during an outbreak.

Emergency Response

- Be calm—stay informed and follow emergency plans.
- Practice infection control:
 - Good hygiene (especially washing hands)
 - Social distancing—
 - Limit direct contact by not shaking hands.
 - Telecommute or hold telephone or video conferences.
 - Maintain personal space of three feet or more.
- Limit exposure with sick people, and stay home if you are sick.
- Quarantine measures may be used to limit movement of people who may have been exposed to the disease, and isolation measures may be taken for those infected with the disease.

Where to Find Additional Information

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—www.avianflu.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—<http://cdc.gov/flu/avian>
- World Health Organization (WHO)—www.who.int/topics/avian_influenza/en
- U.S. Department of State—www.travel.state.gov/index.html

Semper Paratus

Be “Always Ready.” Get an emergency supply kit good for at least three days, make an emergency plan with your family, and be informed about what might happen.