

AVIAN INFLUENZA (H5N1)

WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian influenza A (H5N1) or “bird flu” is a serious viral infection that occurs primarily in poultry, migratory waterfowl, and—less commonly—pigs. Although it is unusual for humans to acquire influenza virus infections from birds, human infections and deaths caused by the H5N1 virus have occurred. Humans have no immunity to this virus, and a human avian flu vaccine is not yet available, although vaccine trials are underway.

WHERE ARE PEOPLE AT RISK FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Anywhere there are cases of H5N1 avian influenza occurring in birds, there is a risk that humans can also become ill if exposed to this virus. Most recently, H5N1 outbreaks among poultry and other birds have been reported in SE Asia, Russia, and Kazakhstan. Human deaths have occurred in **Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia**.

HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME INFECTED?

The H5N1 virus is secreted in the droppings and respiratory and eye secretions of infected birds or poultry. Humans can become infected through direct contact with infected poultry or birds (e.g., in live animal markets or poultry farms); contact with surfaces that are contaminated with droppings of infected birds; and possibly by eating under-cooked, infected poultry or eggs. Theoretically, the virus may also be transmitted through inhalation of air-borne feces. Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Initially avian (H5N1) influenza may appear like a severe case of regular influenza. Symptoms can range from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, headaches) to eye inflammation, severe pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, severe diarrhea, encephalitis (brain inflammation), seizures, or coma.

HOW CAN I PREVENT AVIAN INFLUENZA?

A) If you plan to travel to an area where H5N1 avian influenza has been detected, take the following precautions:

- Check for any travel restrictions.
- Identify an in-country health care resource before travel.
- Get a regular flu vaccination if you have not had one this year. Flu vaccine won't protect you against avian influenza but may decrease the chance of confusing regular flu with avian influenza if you do become sick.
- Carry a first-aid/medical supply kit with you. Include an **oral thermometer**, alcohol-based wipes/hand sanitizer, and masks, such as 2- or 3-ply surgical, N95, etc.
- Do not embark on travel if you have a fever.
- Avoid all contact with all poultry, waterfowl, and other birds.
- Avoid live animal markets (“wet markets”) and poultry farms.
- Avoid any surfaces that may be contaminated with bird droppings.
- Thoroughly cook poultry and eggs before eating; heat destroys influenza viruses.
- Frequent, thorough hand washing is vital. Carry and use alcohol hand sanitizers or towelettes. Be especially vigilant after shaking hands, before eating, and after using the toilet.
- When possible, change seats in an airplane to avoid travelers with respiratory symptoms. Carry and use masks as directed by your health care provider.

WHAT DO I DO IF I BECOME ILL?

If you become ill with a fever or any flu-like symptoms during travel or for 10 days after travel to an H5N1-infected area, seek medical care. Inform your physician of your symptoms and travel itinerary, including possible exposure.

