

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

FACT SHEET

What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is caused by flu viruses found in birds. There are different kinds of bird flu. The one that scientists think could become dangerous to humans is H5N1.

What kinds of animals carry avian influenza?

Some wild birds carry the virus. It does not usually make them sick. Domestic birds like chickens, ducks, and turkeys can also carry it. They may get sick or die. In the United States there have been 16 cases of avian influenza in poultry since 1997, but none of these illnesses were caused by H5N1. Other animals such as cats and pigs may carry avian influenza, but it is not common.

Can avian influenza spread from birds to people?

Avian influenza viruses can change to become dangerous to both birds and people, but it is rare. It has only happened a few times since 1997 in foreign countries. These cases probably occurred because people were in contact with infected birds, bird feces or bird remains.

Can I catch avian influenza from a sick person?

Right now the H5N1 strain of avian influenza is not easily passed from person-to-person. In fact, there have only been one or two cases of one person catching H5N1 avian influenza from another person.

How long can the avian influenza virus survive outside the body?

No one is sure. The virus could survive for days on surfaces after it is expelled by coughing or sneezing.

Who is most at risk for infection from avian influenza?

People in direct contact with poultry outside of America are most at risk.

Is there a test for avian influenza?

There is no test your health care provider can use to find avian influenza. Only advanced laboratories have tests to detect the virus. If there is an outbreak, these laboratories would supply your health care provider with information to make the right diagnosis.

What are the symptoms of avian influenza in people?

Symptoms could include fever, body aches, cough and tiredness.

What treatment is there for avian influenza ?

Avian influenza may be treated with antiviral drugs. These drugs require a doctor's prescription. People sick with any kind of flu should rest and avoid alcohol or tobacco products. Comfort medications may be taken to relieve symptoms. Consult your health care provider for specific recommendations.

Is there vaccine for H5N1 avian influenza?

The flu shot that is offered each year for seasonal influenza does not offer protection against avian influenza. Scientists are working to develop a vaccine for H5N1, but it will be some time before it is approved for use.

Is it safe to eat chicken or turkey?

Scientists do not believe you can get avian influenza from eating infected poultry or eggs. However, to protect yourself from food-borne and other illnesses, always store and handle uncooked meat safely, wash your hands before and after handling meat and cook it to a safe internal temperature.

What else can I do to protect myself and my family?

One of the best methods for preventing disease is to practice good hand washing. Eating right, getting plenty of rest, drinking water and staying active are also great ways to keep your immune system strong. Also, monitor a credible news source for updates and information on avian influenza.