



Avian Influenza Virus A/H5N1 (Bird Flu)

Avian Influenza (A/H5N1) virus normally affects only animals, but has recently been seen in humans.

Avian flu viruses are transmitted by contact with infected poultry or its excretions. There has been no known human-to-human spread of the virus.

The current flu shot does not protect against Avian Influenza.

Travelers to Asia should avoid poultry farms and contact with animals in live food markets. Processed poultry products and eggs do not pose a health risk.

BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and the US Army's Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) are concerned about the potential for human-human transmission of this highly pathogenic flu strain. A number of countries in Asia have reported incidences of avian influenza, commonly referred to as bird flu. As of 4 February 04, 17 confirmed cases of bird-human transmissions of the avian flu have been reported in Asia—13 of these have died.

HOW IS AVIAN INFLUENZA TRANSMITTED?

The disease is thought to have been caused by individuals' contact with infected poultry populations or their excretions. There has been no known human-human transmission of the virus. Although the disease has not yet been found in Europe, it has spread quickly through Asia. In 2003, another strain of avian flu reached Europe (the Netherlands), causing 83 cases and 1 death.

WHY IS AVIAN INFLUENZA A SERIOUS PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN?

There is valid, heightened concern that the H5N1 Avian flu virus in humans will combine with normal human flu viruses. Such a mutation would produce a human virus that contains avian flu virus and is highly contagious from human to human. This could produce very severe human flu cases and be difficult to control.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP CONTROL THE SPREAD OF AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Public health professionals world-wide are working to increase surveillance and diagnosis of the avian H5N1 virus in humans and susceptible animals (including chickens, turkeys, and pigs) in countries where initial cases of H5N1 were detected. In addition, millions of birds are being slaughtered as a protective measure.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH AVIAN INFLUENZA INFECTED ANIMALS?

Persons in contact with infected poultry flocks should be on guard for any signs and symptoms of respiratory disease. If symptoms arise, consult a doctor, who may then initiate laboratory testing, consideration of vaccination or antiviral medications, and reporting to health officials.

DOES THE CURRENT YEAR'S FLU SHOT PROTECT AGAINST AVIAN INFLUENZA?

The current influenza vaccine does not protect against infection with the A/H5N1 virus. A vaccine for A/H5N1 is currently being developed, but will not be ready for several months.

WHAT MEASURES SHOULD TRAVELERS TO CONUS SITES TAKE?

CDC and the WHO have not issued any travel alerts or advisories for avian flu-infected areas. Travelers to countries in Asia with documented H5N1 outbreaks are advised to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. The WHO does not at present conclude that any processed poultry products (whole refrigerated or frozen carcasses and products derived from these) and eggs in or arriving from areas currently experiencing outbreaks of avian influenza H5N1 in poultry pose a risk to public health. The importance of good hygiene practices should continuously be emphasized during handling, including hand washing, prevention of cross-contamination and thorough cooking of poultry products.

References and more information:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm
2. World Health Organization, www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/
3. European Influenza Surveillance Scheme, www.eiss.org/index.cgi