

BIRD FLU



NOTES FOR THE PUBLIC
ON BIRD FLU

Why a pamphlet on bird flu?

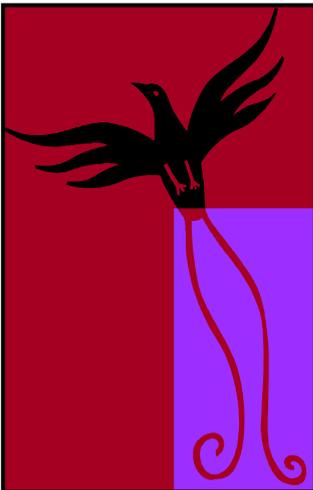
Whenever the world is faced with new health threats there is a concern that ill-informed rumours will create epidemics of fear. H5N1 avian influenza, or what is commonly called bird flu, presents one of those health threats. These notes can help people understand what bird flu is and what can be done about it.

What is influenza or flu?

Influenza or “the flu” is caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory tract. It is contagious and can spread quickly.

What is avian influenza or bird flu?

Avian influenza is commonly called “bird flu”. Bird flu is largely a contagious disease among birds, commonly caught from one bird to another. It is thought to affect all birds, both wild and domestic. In mild form, bird flu can occur among wild migratory birds without obvious sign and has mild affects including those on the respiratory system. In its severe form, bird flu can affect a bird’s respiratory tract, invade many organs and can kill the bird.



Recently, a new type of bird flu virus, called “H5N1”, has emerged. It is causing severe disease and has spread among birds globally. H5N1 bird flu has made some wild migratory birds and domestic poultry very sick and has killed them.

Human infection with H5N1 bird flu

The H5N1 virus is currently a serious concern to human health. H5N1 is a severe disease and, unusually, it has crossed the species barrier; it has passed from birds to people. Presently, over 100 people have caught the H5N1 bird flu and died from it. The H5N1 virus currently does not easily pass from birds to humans. This could change, however, and more people could become infected very quickly.

How do people currently catch bird flu?

What is currently known is that H5N1 bird flu is passed to a person mainly by direct contact with infected sick or dead birds or surfaces and objects contaminated by the bird faeces. It can also be caught from infected dead or live bird nasal secretions and saliva and from surfaces contaminated by infected bird excretions or secretions.

For example, there have been a few cases where it is thought children caught H5N1 bird flu from poultry faeces by playing in areas where poultry had been.

H5N1 also caught from contact with infected sick or dead birds

What does bird flu do to people?

In the few cases where people who were recently exposed to infected birds have caught H5N1 bird flu, symptoms included a fever (at least 38 degrees Celsius), cough, shortness of breath, difficulty

breathing and sometimes pneumonia. Diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain, chest pain, multi-organ dysfunction and bleeding from the nose and gums have also been reported. Most cases reported have occurred in previously healthy children and young adults. So far, of the few people who caught H5N1 bird flu, more than half have died.

Is it safe to eat poultry?

*thoroughly
cook poultry
and eggs*

When poultry and eggs are safely handled and properly cooked, humans are not at risk of acquiring H5N1 infection through food. However, birds that are known to have been sick should not be eaten even if properly cooked.

Always keep good hygiene when preparing food for cooking. Ensure cooked food is kept separate from uncooked poultry or eggs, or of surfaces such as utensils contaminated with them.

Wash hands before and after food preparation.

Human flu pandemic

There is a possibility that the H5N1 virus could develop into one that can easily pass from person to person and continue to spread to other people. If this occurs, the flu could spread to more countries and many more people on a greater scale.

What you can do now

Respiratory illnesses such as the flu are spread by coughing or sneezing and unclean hands. To prevent the spread of flu:

- wash your hands with soap and water
 - cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
 - limit your movement if a bird flu outbreak is in your area
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Wash your hands with soap and water

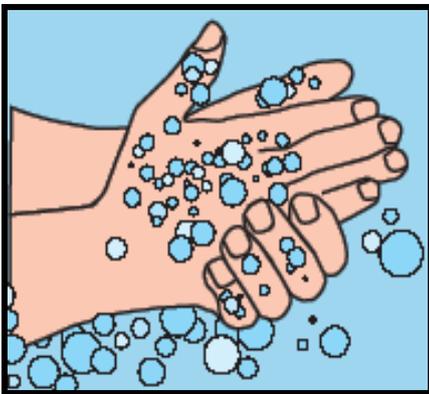
Hand washing prevents the spread of infection. Wash hands with soap and water especially:

- after coughing or sneezing,
- before and after preparing food. Also clean food preparation surfaces and utensils with soap and water.
- before and after feeding children,
- after using latrines, and
- after bathing or cleaning children.

If soap is not available, use ash instead.

Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing

Covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing prevents the spread of infection.



- Always cover your nose and mouth with a cloth, scarf or towel, or with your sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of the cloth, scarf or towel, or clean it with soap and water. Do not cough or sneeze into your hands because this will spread the flu when you touch other surfaces or people.
 - Always wash hands after coughing or sneezing.
 - Avoid coughing or sneezing when other people are near. Keep away from others until you no longer have respiratory symptoms.
 - Ask people who are coughing or sneezing to cover their nose and mouth, as well.
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Limit your movement

Limiting movement of people prevents the spread of any infection. If there is an outbreak or if the flu becomes serious in your area:

- protect yourself and others by avoiding public gatherings or public places
- stay away from others if you are sick

- avoid contact with the secretions of people with respiratory symptoms
- stay where you are most likely to get treatment if needed
- if you are caring for a sick person, protect yourself. Cover your nose and mouth and wash your hands with soap and water after every visit. Also avoid close contact with other people during the time the sick person is infectious (as advised by health worker).

*don't touch
dead birds*

Other actions you can take

Keep away from and never touch dead birds that you may find. Report any dead birds to local authorities.

Keep living areas clean. Disinfect surfaces or objects that may have been exposed to secretions and excretions of infected live or dead birds.

Keep some distance from domestic or wild birds and their faeces. Avoid bringing live poultry near your living area.

Keep domestic poultry in pens and under a roof to avoid contact with other birds or people. Keep children away from playing in places where poultry frequent.

*stay away from
poultry markets*

Stay away from poultry farms and poultry markets where birds are slaughtered and cleaned.

More information

Up-to-date information on avian flu and human pandemic preparedness can be found at:

- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>
- http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/hlp.nsf/db900ByKey/avian_influenza?OpenDocument

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For further information please contact:

**The International Centre for Migration and Health
11 Route du Nant d'Avril
CH-1214 Vernier (Ge)
Switzerland
Tel: + 41 22 783 1080 Fax: + 41 22 783 1087
Email: admin@icmh.ch**