

# AVIAN INFLUENZA

## (Bird Flu)

### What is bird flu?

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses which differs from human flu viruses. These viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but do not usually get sick. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds—chickens, ducks and turkeys—very sick and even kill them.

### Does bird flu infect humans?

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but bird flu has been transmitted to humans primarily in Southeast Asian countries. It has not yet appeared in the United States.

### How do humans get bird flu?

Humans get bird flu from contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva and droppings. A person can catch bird flu when an infected chicken coughs or sneezes onto a person's face, or when a person breathes bird dropping particles.

The virus may be passed to humans by eating uncooked poultry. The virus is not passed by eating cooked meat or eggs, so there is no danger in eating fully cooked chicken, duck or turkey.

The World Health Organization is still closely monitoring whether bird flu will spread easily from person-to-person.

### What are the symptoms?

The time between exposure to bird flu and symptoms may be up to 10 days. Symptoms may include:

- Flu-like symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches.
- Shortness of breath
- Eye infections

Severe cases of bird flu can cause serious breathing problems including pneumonia. Bird flu can cause death.

### How is bird flu treated?

Treatment of people with bird flu will depend on their symptoms. Depending on how serious the symptoms, treatment may include supportive care, use of anti-viral medicines, and/or hospitalization.

Studies suggest that prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses may work in preventing bird flu in humans. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs and may not always work.

### Why is there so much concern?

The risk from bird flu is generally low for most people because the virus occurs mainly in domestic and wild birds. But during an outbreak of bird flu, there is a risk to people who have close contact with infected birds or surfaces that have been contaminated.

Because influenza viruses have the ability to change, scientists are concerned that the virus will one day infect people and spread easily from person-to-person. If the virus changes itself and were able to infect people and spread, an influenza pandemic—a worldwide outbreak of the disease—could begin.

No one can predict when a pandemic might occur. Experts from around the world are watching the situation very closely and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily and widely from person-to-person.

### Is there a vaccine?

There is currently no vaccine available for humans, but a vaccine to protect birds is currently being used. Vaccine development efforts are under way and research to test a vaccine for humans began in April 2005.