

Avian Flu

Avian flu, also known as bird flu, is a respiratory disease that can infect humans as well as birds. It is caused by a flu-like virus.

Avian flu is transmitted to humans in South-east Asian countries from bird droppings or by eating inadequately cooked poultry.

Avian flu is very contagious among birds and can be deadly to both birds and humans.

Can Avian Flu infect humans?

Yes. While avian flu viruses generally do not infect humans, there have been several cases of human infection with avian flu viruses that have occurred since 1997.

How do humans get Avian Flu?

Humans can get avian flu from contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva and droppings. A person can catch the avian flu virus when an infected chicken coughs or sneezes onto his/her face, or by breathing in bird dropping particles.

The World Health Organization is still investigating whether avian flu spreads from human-to-human.

The virus is not passed through eating cooked meat or eggs, so there is no danger in eating fully cooked chicken or duck.

What are the symptoms of Avian Flu in humans?

- ◆ The time period between exposure to symptoms may be up to 10 days.
- ◆ Flu-like symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Eye infections
- ◆ Severe cases of avian flu can cause serious breathing problems including pneumonia and can cause death.

What treatment is available for Avian Flu?

Health care providers will tell patients how to treat, depending on their symptoms. Based on the severity of the symptoms, treatment may include hospitalization, supportive care and/or the use of anti-virals. There is an antiviral drug that can be used for the prevention and treatment of Avian Flu.

Is there a vaccine that can protect me from Avian Flu?

No, a vaccine that protects from avian flu is not available at this time. Providers may choose to give regular flu vaccine to high-risk groups such as poultry workers, to reduce the risk that they may become infected with both the human and avian viruses at the same time.

Why is there a concern about getting both viruses at the same time?

The mixing of human and avian viruses could produce a new kind of flu to which humans have no protection. It is also possible that the new type of flu would be easily passed from person-to-person, which could cause widespread outbreak (pandemic) and even death.

Protect yourself

Even though there is no conclusive evidence that avian flu is transmitted person-to-person, health officials recommend people take the same precautions to protect themselves against avian flu as they would colds and other flu.

Wash your hands frequently and stay away from people who are coughing, have a fever greater than 100 degrees, have other flu-like symptoms, and have recently traveled to an Asian country.

**Kalamazoo County Public Health
Emergency Information Line:
269-373-5300**

Visit our website at www.kalcounty.com

When is pandemic influenza A expected?

Influenza pandemics occur naturally. There were three pandemics in the 20th century. The pandemic of 1918-1919 was the most severe pandemic on record, in which 50 million or more persons around the world died, including approximately 650,000 Americans.

It is not possible to predict accurately when influenza pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. However, the current outbreak of avian influenza in Asia has influenza experts concerned that a pandemic is developing that may be severe.

Why does the current bird flu outbreak in Southeast Asia pose a risk of causing a pandemic influenza A outbreak in humans?

New human influenza viruses arise from bird influenza viruses that then change to a form that can infect humans and spread rapidly from person to person. The current bird flu outbreak in Asia is caused by a type of influenza A virus called "H5N1." The H5N1 outbreak among domestic chickens and ducks in Asia is widespread and uncontrolled. Human infections and deaths due to the avian H5N1 virus have occurred, although the virus has at this time not developed the ability to pass easily from person to person and cause outbreaks in humans.

What can the public do to reduce their risk of pandemic influenza?

- ◆ **Stay informed.** These websites provide regularly updated information about bird flu and pandemic flu:

Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services: www.kalcounty.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov

For more information on the vaccine development process, visit the **National Institutes of Health:** www.niaid.nih.gov

- ◆ **Stop germs from spreading.**

Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing

Wash your hands often

Stay home when you are sick

- ◆ **If you plan to travel to Southwest Asia, visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov for travel advisories.**

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