

# Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### What is avian influenza, and why is it a concern?

Avian influenza (H5N1), also known as bird flu, is a disease of wild birds and domesticated poultry like farm chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Although millions of birds have been infected, only a very small number of people have been infected. Because all influenza viruses have the ability to change, there is concern that the H5N1 virus could mutate and be spread easily and widely by humans. If that happens, it is possible that a pandemic or widespread outbreak of disease could occur. World health organizations are monitoring the situation and making plans to control avian influenza.

### What is the difference between avian influenza and pandemic influenza?

A pandemic influenza occurs when a new influenza virus: 1) develops and there is little or no immunity (protection due to previous infection or vaccination) in the human population; 2) it is easily passed from human to human; 3) is found in many countries; and, 4) causes serious illness in humans. Presently avian influenza (H5N1) is not a pandemic influenza because it is mostly a disease of birds and is not easily passed between humans

### Is there avian influenza in the U.S. now?

No. Avian influenza has not been found in wild birds, domestic poultry, or humans in the United States.

### How can a person get avian influenza?

Avian influenza is not easily passed from birds to humans. People may get avian influenza by touching an infected bird, fluid or surfaces contaminated with fluids from infected birds and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. People who could be at risk are those who travel to countries with outbreaks of avian influenza and have close contact with live or improperly cooked poultry while there.

## Is it safe to eat poultry?

Yes, it is safe to eat properly cooked poultry. Cooking destroys germs, including bird flu viruses. The United States maintains trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries where the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza strain has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised poultry, not in wild or migratory birds.

### ***Guidelines for the safe preparation of poultry include the following:***

- Wash hands before and after handling food.
- Keep raw poultry and its juices away from other foods.
- Keep hands, utensils, and surfaces, such as cutting boards, clean.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure food has reached the safe internal temperature - in all parts of the bird. Cook poultry to at least 165°F to kill food-borne germs that might be present, including the avian influenza virus.

For more information, see poultry preparation fact sheets at:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Poultry\\_Preparation\\_Fact\\_Sheets/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Poultry_Preparation_Fact_Sheets/index.asp)

## What can I do to prevent catching avian influenza?

When traveling to areas reporting avian flu outbreaks avoid direct contact with poultry, wild birds, farms, and live-animal markets. Avoid touching surfaces contaminated with poultry feces (droppings) or secretions and only eat well-cooked poultry. Wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

## What are the symptoms?

Individuals with avian influenza (H5N1) usually develop symptoms within 10 days of contact with infected birds, became very ill, and required hospitalization. Symptoms are usually severe and include high fever, muscle aches, cough, mucus production and shortness of breath. Abdominal pain and diarrhea can also occur.

## Will bird flu cause the next influenza pandemic?

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease of wild and farm birds caused by avian influenza viruses. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but since 1997 there have been a number of confirmed cases of human infection from bird flu viruses. Most of these resulted from direct or close contact with infected birds (for example: domesticated chickens, ducks, and turkeys). It is important not to handle, play with, or pick up dead birds.

## Where can I get information?

Information on who to contact in your state is at:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/state/statecontacts.html>

## What types of birds can carry bird flu viruses?

Avian influenza viruses can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, and guinea fowl, as well as a wide variety of other birds, including migratory waterfowl. Each year, there is a flu season for birds just as there is for humans and, as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others, depending on how strong the virus. A weak virus may cause only mild illness in infected poultry and birds but a strong virus could cause severe and extremely contagious illness, and even death, among infected poultry and birds.

## I live near people who keep chickens and other poultry? Am I safe?

This does not present a risk. At the present time, the H5N1 strain of bird flu that has spread through poultry farms in southeast Asia and into eastern Europe is not present in the U.S. Even if the H5N1 strain were to appear in the U.S., transmission from birds to people would require close contact with birds, such as handling, butchering or exposure to bird droppings.

## I have a bird feeder and a bird bath in my yard. Is this safe?

Maintaining a clean bird feeder or bird bath is generally safe, unless these are attracting rodents or raccoons. It is always best to wear protective gloves when handling or cleaning these items to avoid contact with bird droppings or contaminated water in a bird bath. Always wash your hands with soap and water after doing these chores.

## Does owning a caged pet bird increase the possibility of catching or spreading avian flu?

The likelihood of getting a pet bird that is already infected with avian flu is very low. It is illegal in the U.S. to import pet birds from regions that are infected with bird flu. In addition, if you're concerned and already own a pet bird, keep it inside to avoid exposure to wild or migratory birds.

If you are buying a new bird, especially of an exotic variety, be sure it has been legally imported. Smuggled birds from affected areas could possibly be infected with the bird flu virus. Information about federal embargoes on bird importation can be found at [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm)

## Can bird flu virus spread to my pet dog and cat?

There is no evidence that bird flu is a risk to dogs. Recently, there have been reports of a canine influenza virus in the U.S. but this is a different flu virus that affects only dogs. There is evidence from the Asian outbreak that the bird flu virus might affect cats fed raw poultry, but there is currently no cause for concern because the virus is not present in the U.S.

## What is being done to monitor for bird flu in wild birds?

Several agencies are conducting surveillance for bird flu among wild birds, especially migratory waterfowl. Surveillance is being strengthened in certain parts of the country such as Alaska because it is believed that migratory birds like ducks and geese could carry bird flu there from Asia and Russia.

A fact sheet about the ecology of bird flu (avian influenza) viruses in wild bird populations can be found at the [National Wildlife Health Center's](#) website.

From the Office of Fire Chief, Bryan Johannes  
As part of the Hudson Fire Department's ongoing  
Public Awareness and Education Campaign for the citizens of Hudson