

Facts:

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



Avian Influenza (bird flu): questions and answers

What is avian influenza?

- Avian influenza, or “bird flu,” is an illness caused by influenza viruses that naturally occur in birds, especially wild waterfowl like ducks and geese.

Are there different kinds of avian flu?

- There are two main kinds of avian flu viruses, “high pathogenic” and “low pathogenic.”
- High pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) means that the virus causes severe disease and death in poultry such as chickens and turkeys. Waterfowl like ducks and geese are better able to resist the virus. The same high pathogenic viruses that cause no signs of disease in waterfowl can kill domestic poultry like chickens and turkeys quickly.
- Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) causes milder disease and many fewer deaths in poultry. It is common among wild and domestic birds in many countries.
- The type of avian flu that has been spreading since October 2003 is high pathogenic H5N1. Wild birds carrying the HPAI H5N1 strain can spread the virus to domestic birds.

Can people catch avian flu viruses?

- People usually do not become infected with avian flu viruses, but a small number of high pathogenic avian flu infections from H5N1 have been reported. Many of those infected have died.
- Most people who were infected with high pathogenic avian flu had very close contact with sick birds.

How does avian flu spread?

- Infected birds spread particles of the virus from mouth and nose fluids, and from their droppings. Birds that do not show signs of illness from the disease can spread the virus.
- People can be infected with the virus from contact with infected birds or their droppings. This includes contact during plucking, handling or playing with infected birds, or contact with surfaces contaminated with droppings from infected birds.

What are the signs of avian flu in people?

- Many of the human cases reported had typical flu symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, headache and muscle aches. Some people developed severe pneumonia and some died from respiratory failure.

Food safety tips for poultry and eggs

- Avian flu is not spread through properly cooked food.
- Poultry and eggs in the U.S. are safe to eat. There are strict regulations that prevent countries that have avian flu outbreaks from sending poultry products to the United States.
- Those who prepare poultry for people to eat should follow the normal rules for handling raw meat:
 - ✓ Keep raw meat, poultry, fish and their juices away from other foods.
 - ✓ After cutting raw meats, wash your hands, cutting boards or dishes, knife and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
 - ✓ Sanitize cutting boards and counter tops with a solution of 1 tablespoon chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water.
 - ✓ Cook poultry in an oven temperature of at least 325 °F.
 - ✓ Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of cooked foods in the deepest part of the dish. Cook whole birds and parts to 165°F.
 - ✓ Do not eat raw eggs.
 - ✓ Cook eggs until the yolks and whites are firm.
 - ✓ Only use raw eggs in foods that are cooked to 160°F after adding eggs. Use pasteurized egg products in recipes that are not cooked, such as egg nog.
 - ✓ Do not thaw meat at room temperature. Thaw meat in the refrigerator.
 - ✓ If you are sick, do not prepare or serve food for other people.

Is there a test for avian flu?

- There are tests for low pathogenic and high pathogenic avian flu in birds. Colorado has tested birds for avian flu since 2004, including private and commercial poultry flocks.
- No birds in Colorado have tested positive for either low pathogenic or high pathogenic H5N1 avian flu.
- There is no routine testing for avian flu in humans in Colorado at this time, since there is no avian flu risk.
- If a person becomes ill after traveling to an area with known avian flu, the doctor will try to find out whether he or she has been exposed to sick birds. If the person may have been exposed to infected birds, the doctor can request testing at the state public health laboratory.

Is there a flu shot to prevent avian flu?

- Not yet. Scientists in several countries are working together to make an effective vaccine to prevent avian flu.
- Vaccines are made to prevent certain viruses. The flu shot you got in the fall is a formula that prevents the specific types of human flu that are circulating this year -- not avian flu.

What is the treatment for avian flu in people?

- Just like most other infections caused by viruses, there is no medicine to cure avian flu.
- If the illness is caught early, prescription antiviral medicines that are used for the common flu may help shorten the length and decrease the severity of the illness.

Is it safe to travel to Asia?

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has not warned Americans to avoid travel to Asia or any other areas where there have been outbreaks of avian flu.
- Travel recommendations are updated as needed at www.cdc.gov/travel.
- Travelers to countries with high pathogenic avian flu should avoid live or dead birds; live bird markets; poultry farms; and bird cages and poultry cooking equipment.

Why is public health watching the avian flu so closely?

- Changes in flu viruses are common. So far, the H5N1 virus has not changed enough to spread easily from person to person.
- Whenever an avian flu virus infects people, there is a chance that the virus could mutate, or change, to a new virus that spread easily from person to person.
- Our immune systems would not recognize a new virus, and could have problems fighting it off. That means the new virus could cause serious illness and death.
- When a new virus is not controlled easily, it could be able to spread rapidly around the world and cause a pandemic.

What is the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic?

- An epidemic is an outbreak of disease that occurs in one or several limited areas, like a city, state or country.
- A disease that spreads beyond the borders of several countries around the world is called a pandemic.

Can pet birds get avian flu?

- Yes. But there is no high pathogenic H5N1 in the U.S., so there is no risk to pet birds at this time.

Is it safe to hang wild bird feeders in the yard?

- Yes. There is no high pathogenic H5N1 in the U.S.

Is it safe to hunt and eat game birds?

- Yes. There is no high pathogenic avian flu in the U.S. As always, hunters should use disposable, waterproof gloves when handling game birds, and should wash their hands afterwards.

Is working in a restaurant with poultry products safe?

- Yes. There is no high pathogenic H5N1 in this country, so there is no risk of being infected with avian flu from working or eating in a restaurant.

What should I do if I find a dead wild bird?

- If you find multiple dead waterfowl in the wild, such as ducks or geese, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife at 303-297-1192.
- If you are concerned about possible exposure of domestic birds to sick or dead wild birds, contact your local veterinarian.
- Avoid contact with dead birds. If you must handle them, use waterproof gloves and wash your hands well afterwards.

Additional sources of information

Colorado HELP hotline

www.cohelp.us
1-877-462-2911 (toll-free)
M-F 7 a.m. – 11 p.m.; S-S 9:30 a.m.–8 p.m.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm and
www.pandemicflu.gov
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

www.cdph.state.co.us/dc/influenza
303-692-2700
1-800-866-7689 (toll-free)

World Health Organization (WHO)

www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza

Colorado Division of Wildlife

www.wildlife.state.co.us
303-297-1192



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