



Avian Influenza – Do Birds Get The Flu Too???
Frequently asked questions about the “Bird Flu”
From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency
www.bhsj.org

What is “avian influenza?” Viruses that infect birds are called “avian influenza viruses.

Does avian influenza give birds the flu? Avian influenza does not make wild birds sick, but can make domesticated birds (e.g. chickens and turkeys) very sick and even kill them.

Does avian influenza affect people? Avian influenza does not **usually** directly infect people; however, several instances of human infections and outbreaks have been reported since 1997. When such infections occur, public health authorities monitor the situation closely because of concerns about the potential for more widespread infection.

What are the symptoms? It depends on whether you are a bird or a person? (wise guy!)

If you’re a bird...most flu viruses cause no symptoms, or only mild ones in wild birds. Infection with certain avian influenza A viruses can cause widespread disease and death among some wild birds and especially birds such as chickens and pheasants.

If you’re a person...reported symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe breathing problems, viral pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening problems.

Is there a cure/shot for this disease? Antiviral drugs are often effective against influenza A virus strains in otherwise healthy adults and children, but have some limitations. Some of these drugs are also expensive and supplies are limited and they may not be effective against these new strains of flu.

Has this happened before? There are only a few reported outbreaks of avian influenza in recent years including; **1997:** Hong Kong, avian influenza A infected both chickens and humans. This was the first time an avian influenza virus had ever been found to transmit directly from birds to humans. 18 people were hospitalized and 6 died. To control the outbreak, authorities killed about 1.5 million chickens to remove the source of the virus.

1999: Hong Kong, cases of avian influenza A were confirmed in 2 children. Both patients recovered, and no additional cases were confirmed. Evidence suggested that poultry was the source and the transmission was from bird to human.

2003: Two cases of avian influenza A infection occurred among members of a Hong Kong family that had traveled to China. One person recovered, the other died.

2003 to present – Since 2003 there have been 205 cases of ‘bird flu’ worldwide with 113 deaths. None of these have been in the U.S.

This sounds like a problem in Asia. What about in the U.S.? – The current bird flu in the news, often called H5N1, has been found in an increasing number of countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. Currently, H5N1 avian influenza is not present in the United States. It is likely H5N1 will spread to this country, and the U.S. government is taking steps to prepare for and minimize the potential impact of bird flu. Historically, highly pathogenic strains of avian influenza have been detected in domestic poultry populations three times in the United States: in 1924, 1983 and 2004. There have been no occurrences of this new kind of avian influenza in wild birds in the United States and no significant human illness resulted from any of the previous outbreaks.

**For more information on avian influenza and many other health topics, visit our website at www.bhsj.org
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