

**Avian Influenza – Do Birds Get The Flu Too???**  
**Frequently asked questions about the “Bird Flu”**  
**From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**  
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**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 such as ducks. Infection with certain avian influenza A viruses can cause widespread disease and death among some birds such as chickens and turkeys.

**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.

**This sounds like a problem in Asia. What about in the U.S.?** - Since early **February 2004**, avian influenza outbreaks have been reported in several locations in the United States. Cases of the “bird flu” have been found in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Texas. The CDC and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are working with the Texas Department of Health and the Texas Animal Health Commission on both the human health and animal/veterinary issues to contain this outbreak in poultry and minimize risk to people. The health risk to humans from the avian influenza outbreak is considered low at this time.

**For more information on avian influenza and many other health topics, visit our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)**  
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