

FACT SHEET: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1)

May 2024

WHAT IS HPAI A(H5N1)?

Avian influenza, commonly referred to as bird flu, is a disease caused by infection with avian influenza Type A viruses. HPAI A(H5N1) is one of the viruses responsible for most human infections of avian influenza.

WHO GETS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian influenza viruses affect wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species. Avian influenza viruses do not normally infect humans, but rare sporadic human infections have occurred.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Symptoms of avian influenza range from mild illness (e.g., eye redness or mild flu-like upper respiratory symptoms), to severe (e.g., pneumonia requiring hospitalization). Possible symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Avian influenza cannot be diagnosed by symptoms alone; lab testing is needed.

HOW IS AVIAN INFLUENZA SPREAD?

Infected birds spread avian influenza viruses through their saliva, mucous and feces. Other infected animals may have viruses present in respiratory secretions, different organs, or body fluids. Human infections are rare but can occur when droplets and small particles that contain avian influenza viruses land on a person's eyes, nose, mouth, or are inhaled. Contact with contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes may also cause infection. The main risk factor is through close, prolonged and unprotected contact with infected birds or other animals.

IS A PERSON WITH AVIAN INFLUENZA CONTAGIOUS?

The transmission of avian influenza from one infected person to another is very rare, and when it has happened, it was not widespread. However, because of the possibility that avian influenza viruses could shift and gain the ability to spread

easily between people, public health monitoring is important.

HOW IS AVIAN INFLUENZA TREATED AND IS THERE A VACCINE?

Avian influenza can be treated with flu antiviral medications. Antivirals may also be given following unprotected exposure to an infected person with confirmed avian influenza or following unprotected exposure to sick or dead poultry or other infected animals to prevent infection and illness. Although avian influenza vaccines are not available at this time, you can reduce your risk of becoming ill with seasonal flu and avian influenza at the same time (co-infection) by getting the seasonal flu vaccine.

CAN AVIAN INFLUENZA SPREAD THROUGH CHICKEN OR DAIRY PRODUCTS?

You cannot get avian influenza from eating fully cooked wild or domestic poultry products like chicken, turkey or duck. There is no evidence that it can be spread through pasteurized dairy products. Pasteurization is the process of heating food (e.g., milk) to a specific temperature for a set period to kill harmful bacteria and viruses.

CAN AVIAN INFLUENZA BE PREVENTED?

Yes, avian influenza can be prevented by taking the following precautions: Practice good hand hygiene, wear protective equipment when necessary, avoid contact with wild or domestic birds that appear ill or have died, avoid contact with surfaces that appear to be contaminated with animal feces, raw milk, or litter, cook poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165°F. Call 202-576-6664 to report sick or dead birds and other animals.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about Avian Influenza and other related health topics can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit dchealth.dc.gov or call (202) 442-5955.

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