

Get the Facts:

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

What is Bird Flu?

Bird flu is caused by avian influenza viruses and occurs naturally among birds. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

The current outbreak of avian influenza A (H5N1) among poultry in Asia is an example of a bird flu outbreak that has caused some human infections and deaths.

History

The great influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 caused 40 to 50 million deaths worldwide and was followed by other flu pandemics in 1957–1958 and 1968–1969.

Present Outbreak

The first known infection of humans with bird flu occurred in Hong Kong in 1997. The H5N1 strain caused severe respiratory disease in 18 humans, of whom six died.

The present outbreaks of H5N1 started among poultry in eight countries in Asia (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam) during late 2003 and early 2004.

Currently there have been reports of Human cases from Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Turkey and Romania. So far the virus has infected more than 100 humans and killed 60-65 in Asia.

Transmission

Avian flu viruses may be spread to humans in two main ways:

- Directly from birds or from bird-flu contaminated environments;
- Through an intermediate host, such as a pig.

The virus does not spread easily from human to human, if at all. But experts fear that the virus could change in ways that make it possible for it to spread easily among humans.

Vaccination/ Treatment

There currently is no vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus. However, vaccine development efforts are under way.

Four antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zanamivir) are approved by the U.S for the treatment or prevention of bird flu. However, some bird flu strains are becoming resistant to these drugs. International public health officials are constantly monitoring avian

viruses for resistance to these drugs so that the most effective antiviral medication can be used in any outbreak.

What is the risk to people in the United States?

The current risk to Americans from the H5N1 bird flu outbreak is low. The strain of H5N1 virus found in Asia has not been found in the United States. There have been no human cases of H5N1 flu in the United States.

Should I worry about dead birds in my neighborhood?

No. There is no evidence any birds in the U.S. are affected by the avian flu.

What is Public Health doing to prepare for a possible bird flu outbreak?

Public Health:

- 1) Investigates all infectious disease outbreaks;
- 2) Gets regular updates from state and federal authorities about bird flu in the U.S. and in the world;

3) Plans and trains to dispense vaccine or medicine to large numbers of people – if needed in an outbreak.

In the event of a bird flu outbreak in Champaign County, Public Health investigators and other health officials would:

- 1) Locate and isolate every person affected by or exposed to the disease;
- 2) Educate the public about the disease and how to avoid coming into contact with it;
- 3) Dispense medications or vaccines as needed.

For more information go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>



Public Health Medication Dispensing Drill,
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